

129

Italian Quarterly

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VOLUME 1

NUMBER 1

L'Italia

*Qui sono i fonti chiari per condotto,
qui son gran laghi e ricchi fiumi assai
che rendono in più parti molto frutto.*

*Datterì cedri aranci dentro n'hai,
e campi tanto buoni e sì fruttevoli
quant'io trovassi in altra parte mai.*

*Qui sono i collicei dolci e piacevoli,
adombrati e coperti di bei fiori
e d'erbe sane a tutti i membri fievoli.*

*Qui gigli e rose con soavi odori,
boschetti di cipressi e d'alti pini
con violette di mille colori.*

*Qui sono i bagni sani e tanto fini
ad ogni infermità che tu li vuoi,
che spesso passan di natura i fini.*

*Qui selve e boschi son che paion bruoli,
se vuoi cacciare, ove natura tragge
orsi cervi cinghiali e cavriuoli.*

*Qui son sicuri porti e belle piagge,
qui sono aperte lande e gran pianure
piene d'uccelli e di bestie selvagge;*

*qui vigne e ulivi con buone pasture,
qui nobili cittadi e bei castelli
adorni di palagi e d'alte mure;*

*volti di donne dilicati e belli,
uomini accorti e tratti a gentilezza,
mastri in armi, in destrieri e in ucelli.*

*È l'aere temperato, e con chiarezza
soavi e dolci venti vi disserra:
piena d'amor, d'onor e di ricchezza.*

Fazio Degli Uberti (1305-1367)

Dittamondo, III, 2.

Italian Quarterly

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Since the end of the last war Italy has again assumed a more effective role in world culture. In our own country we have witnessed a particularly widespread revival of interest in things Italian. Believing this to be a permanent trend rather than a temporary fashion, the Editors conceived the *Italian Quarterly* as a concrete expression of this new situation, and intend it to fill a need which has become increasingly urgent.

Our efforts are not directed solely to the specialist or to the scholar of Italian literature, but also to all those persons who are interested in Italian culture and wish to acquire a deeper understanding and a more extensive knowledge of it. Hence, our review is entirely in English. The only exception is the poem *L'Italia*, by the 14th century poet Fazio degli Uberti, which we have chosen for its charm and simplicity as a fitting introduction of the country to whose culture our review is dedicated.

Our first number undoubtedly leans quite heavily toward literature. It could not be otherwise since the *Italian Quarterly* was born in the minds of a small group of people who are men of letters. However, it is our intent to enlarge its scope to include Italian culture in its widest manifestations, and we invite all those who may make contributions in other fields to join us in our efforts.

We wish to thank all those who have aided us in these most difficult early stages, and we are particularly grateful to those who have sent us words of encouragement, and to those who have given us additional support by becoming Founding Patrons. Comments and suggestions from our readers will be most welcome at all times, and will be deeply appreciated as a token of interest.

THE EDITORS

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BOOKS

ITEMS

Francesco De Sanctis

by

RENE' WELLEK

[Professor Wellek, whose interest and competence range over all Western literatures, has lived and taught in Vienna, Prague, London, Iowa City and New Haven. Besides those works noted below, he is the author of books on Kant's influence in England and the history of English literary historiography, as well as a great many essays in literary criticism and theory. Since 1946 he has taught at Yale University, where he is now Sterling Professor of Comparative Literature.

Professor Wellek's essay has the unusual virtue of discussing and evaluating De Sanctis in his European context. That De Sanctis' stature loses nothing, indeed that it gains remarkably, the reader of these pages will soon see. A far richer perspective is available to those who read Professor Wellek's two published volumes of a four-volume *History of Modern Criticism, 1750-1950* (I: The Later Eighteenth Century, II: The Romantic Age; Yale U.P., 1955); and when the present essay assumes its proper place in the third volume (scheduled for publication in 1958), scholars and initiates will find further references and quotations in Italian to spur and guide their researches.

The present essay will appear, translated into Italian, in the journal *Il Mulino* (Bologna). Already the publishing house under the same name has produced an Italian version of *Theory of Literature* (originally published in English, New York, 1949; paperback edition, 1956) by Professors Wellek and Austin Warren. Eventually it will also publish a full translation of the *History of Modern Criticism*.

Since De Sanctis is universally recognized as Italy's greatest literary historian, this re-evaluation of his work in its European setting should leave no doubt of his absolute worth. The *History of Italian Literature* is seen as unfolding "a great spiritual drama: the fall and redemption of Italy." His views may present difficulties, "still his achievement of a synthesis of criticism and literary history is so unique and great that an effort must be made to disentangle the web of his thinking." Here is the needed authoritative disentangling.]

In Italy Francesco De Sanctis (1817-1883) is considered *the* critic, a national classic whose voluminous complete works are constantly republished in rival editions—some even on bad paper, cheaply produced for the “people.”¹ Benedetto Croce, by far the most influential Italian critic of the 20th century, has done most to establish his fame: he has edited, expounded and fervently defended De Sanctis throughout his long writing life. He considers him as a “critic and historian of literature without rival,” and rejects comparisons with Lessing, Macaulay, Sainte-Beuve and Taine as inadequate.² A veritable cult of De Sanctis has come into being: Giuseppe Borgese has proclaimed the *History of Italian Literature* “the masterpiece of Italian culture in the 19th century.”³ Giovanni Gentile advocated a return to De Sanctis as a polemical weapon against Croce. Marxists and students of stylistics today try to reinterpret his teachings to suit their own purposes.⁴

Outside of Italy De Sanctis is practically unknown: he is not even mentioned in recent histories of aesthetics, and Saintsbury, in his *History of Criticism*, treats him quite mistakenly as a mere follower of Sainte-Beuve.⁵ No doubt, during De Sanctis’ life-time specialized students of Italian literature such as Adolf Gaspary and John Addington Symonds knew his work.⁶ Brunetière referred to the *History* with high praise.⁷ But the American translation of the *History* (1931) caused no ripple and a Columbia University dissertation on De Sanctis seems only to have been read by specialists in Italian.⁸

The reasons for this neglect of De Sanctis outside of Italy are not far to seek: De Sanctis wrote almost exclusively on Italian literature, and Italian literature, with the exception of Dante, has, strangely enough, almost ceased to excite critical interest in the rest of the world. De Sanctis, moreover, is so definitely an Italian patriot of the *Risorgimento*, so passionately concerned with the political, intellectual and moral rebirth of his country, and so strongly identified with Naples and the South that he might appear provincial, pedagogical and didactic to an outsider. His style, often highly involved and repetitious, is sometimes rhetorical in a manner grating to Anglo-Saxon ears.⁹ But

more profoundly, the neglect of De Sanctis must be due to the real difficulties of his position, the ambiguities of his terminology, the very complexity of his thought. Still his achievement of a synthesis of criticism and literary history is so unique and great that an effort must be made to disentangle the web of his thinking.

Croce and his followers emphasize De Sanctis' aesthetic doctrines which anticipate Croce's position on several points: the autonomy of art and the concept of form. De Sanctis himself disclaimed any ambition to formulate an aesthetics and prided himself on his bent for the concrete and his distrust of any system.¹⁰ But he does pronounce, though only in passing, on the nature of art. Art "has its own aim and value in itself and must be judged by the special criteria deduced from its nature."¹¹ The phrase "autonomy of art" asserts the distinction between art on the one hand and emotion, morality, science, conceptual knowledge, philosophy and factual truth on the other. Art is not a direct expression of sentiment. "Sentiment is not aesthetic in itself. Sorrow, love, etc. . . as long as it has no power to transform itself and idealize itself, may be eloquent in its expression but may not be artistic. Not only is emotion not the substance of art, but in order that it be capable of arousing the aesthetic faculty it must be kept in just measure. Emotion must not trouble the soul, deprive it of self-control, serenity, disturb its inner harmony."¹² Art is not subservient to morality, as "morality is not the consequence but the presupposition, the antecedent of art."¹³ Art is not an idea or concept, nor science or philosophy in disguise. "Reasoning, doctrinal form are the negation of art."¹⁴ "Thought as thought is outside of art."¹⁵ Nor is art an imitation or passive reflection of reality: it would have no function of its own and would always necessarily remain inferior to reality.¹⁶ Art aims at truth, but only at artistic truth, not at the real, and we can speak of reality in art "only on condition that it is the artistic real and not the natural or historical real."¹⁷ Historical truth is extrinsic to art and anachronisms are thus immaterial. "Historical interest has nothing to do with poetry, which can represent even extraordinary and unnatural things provided it presents them with such a coloring that we have

no time to defend ourselves from enthusiasm and to ask: is it true?"¹⁸ Rather, art is a "shadow, an image, a semblance of the real," "reality raised to illusion."¹⁹

Art is Form, Form with a capital F, as it must not be confused with "forms," with language, diction, tropes and figures or style.²⁰ Form is simply the work of art itself, a concrete, individual substance, a living organic unity. De Sanctis, in variations on the same theme, asserts the unity, the wholeness of a work of art; either by saying that the whole is contained in its parts, fused and interpenetrated, or merely by proclaiming that it is alive, that it is life itself.²¹ At times he would draw an analogy between the work of art and the works of nature.²² In other contexts he would ask for the complete identity of form and content in a perfect work of art.²³ Sometimes the emphasis is shifted to the origin of the Form in the mind of the poet. "This inner process constitutes what in scientific language is called 'form,' which must not be confused with the similar word used by rhetoricians to mean its grossest appearances."²⁴

This inner process is unconscious, spontaneous creation. "Productive spontaneity" is called "genius."²⁵ The poet creates by imagination a poetic "world." This poetic world is above all individual, concrete: art "individualizes;"²⁶ "poetry must come down to earth and take on flesh."²⁷ Even Dante should "paganize."²⁸ Concreteness and individuality are with De Sanctis not merely qualities of the work as whole, but they extend, for instance, to fictional characters. A poetic character must always be just "such a magistrate, such a priest, such a soldier; in this 'such a' is the whole secret of artistic creation."²⁹ Hence, De Sanctis completely rejects the view that "type" is the highest creation of art. In poetry, for him, there are no types but only individuals. "To say that Achilles is the type of force and courage, and that Thersites is the type of cowardice, is inexact, as these qualities may have infinite expressions in individuals. Achilles is Achilles and Thersites is Thersites."³⁰ At most, he would allow type to be an early form of art, "its cradle"³¹ or perhaps the result of a process of dissolution achieved by time in which individuals such as Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, Tartuffe, Hamlet are reduced to mere types in popu-

lar imagination.³² But true art is always individual and creates individuals. Thus, allegory, symbolism and personification are all inartistic. Allegory is condemned because there is no "inter-penetration of the two terms. The thought has not descended into the image: the figured has not descended into the figure."³³ "Allegory dies and poetry is born"³⁴ is an early formula on which De Sanctis insists throughout his *History*.

As art is spontaneous creation, De Sanctis rejects any judgment made on the basis of plans, theories, or intentions of the author. "One thing is to say, another to do."³⁵ One must "distinguish the intentional world and the effective world—what the poet willed and what he has made."³⁶ Thus "the safest and most conclusive method is to look at the book itself and not at the intentions of the author."³⁷

This aesthetics of an organic, concrete, individual work of art, in which form and content are ideally indistinguishable, created by genius in an act of imagination, is matched by an analogous theory of criticism. De Sanctis distinguishes three stages in the critical act: first an act of submission, a surrender to first impressions, then recreation, and finally judgment. Criticism must not, so he says, "falsify or destroy the ingenuity of my sentiments." In the theater we should forget Aristotle and Hegel, cry and laugh, be simply men. "Just as poetics cannot take the place of genius, so criticism cannot take the place of taste, and taste is the genius of the critic. Just as one says that poets are born, so also are critics born: in the critic there is also a kind of genius which must be a gift of nature."³⁸ The critic should identify himself with the artist and the work of art, even recreate it, "give it a second life, and say with the pride of Fichte:—I create God."³⁹ In more sober terms, De Sanctis wants the critic "to remake what the poet has done, to remake it in his own manner and by other means."⁴⁰ Usually this remaking is conceived of as translating from the unconscious to the conscious. "Criticism is the conscience or eye of poetry, the same spontaneous work of genius reproduced as a work reflected by taste. It must not dissolve the poetic universe, it must show the same unity become reason, self-consciousness . . . It is the poetic conception

itself seen from another point of view . . . creation re-thought or reflected.”⁴¹ But this recreation must not be arbitrary. “Criticism does not create; it recreates; it must reproduce.” It should become a “science” or a “superior science,” though De Sanctis speaks of it also as a form of art, with the science understood.⁴² Once De Sanctis even thought of the critic as a performer on the analogy of the actor. “The critic picks up the few syllables and divines the whole word.” Critic and actor “do not simply reproduce the poetic world, but integrate it, fill its gaps.”⁴³

Beyond this recreation, whether translation into consciousness or an acting out of the poet’s words, there is the final critical judgment. “After the critic has acquired a clear awareness of the poetic world, he can determine it, assign to it its position and attribute to it its values. And that is what is properly called *judging or criticizing*.”⁴⁴ The critic must define the “intrinsic value of a work,” and “not what it has in common with the times, a school, or with its predecessors but what it has that is peculiar and untransferable.”⁴⁵ In art De Sanctis does not admit mediocrity because “there is no more-or-less alive. It is alive or dead; there is the poet or the non-poet, the eunuch brain.”⁴⁶

One can see why Croce could claim De Sanctis as his precursor. Croce also stresses the autonomy of art, the individual, concrete, unique work itself, which is not a concept or idea or copy of reality; and he conceives of criticism as identification with the work and as discernment of what is living and what is dead, what is poetry and what is non-poetry. These doctrines in De Sanctis are sufficiently pervasive to refute any attempt to make him a “materialist” or even a forerunner of Marxist aesthetics. But they are not part of a system like Croce’s: there is no continuity between art and ordinary intuition in De Sanctis, there is no sharp distinction between literature and poetry, no identification of intuition with expression and of poetry with lyricism, no reduction of criticism to the definition of sentiment, and no rejection of the very possibility of literary history. On the contrary, De Sanctis, the defender of the autonomy of art, could be described rather as a moralist who sees literature, charged with a high social mission, symbolize a great

historical process. The critic who is to mete out sentences of life and death is actually a historian who sees each work of art justified in its place, fatefully needed, inescapably great or small. The propounder of this "formalism" actually devised a whole scheme of conflicts between content and form and whole series of terms describing the various stages and aspects of a work of art.

De Sanctis is no monist or idealist in Croce's sense. His epistemology is clearly dualistic, generally Kantian: a subject orders an objective world.⁴⁷ The artist does not create *ex nihilo*. In spite of occasional phrases about creative genius, De Sanctis' poet is not like the Christian God but rather more like the Platonic *demiurgos* imposing order on chaos. There is for De Sanctis, a material existing before art, though he insists that the material becomes transformed in art, and that any material can become art. "Everything is the matter of art."⁴⁸ "There is nothing in nature which cannot become art."⁴⁹ Even an immoral, absurd, frivolous content can become form and thus become immortal.⁵⁰ The ugly is not only a possible subject of art but actually preferable to the beautiful, as "the beautiful is only itself; the ugly is itself and its contrary."⁵¹ In his revulsion against abstract neoclassicism and its vacuous ideal, De Sanctis goes so far as to say that Thaïs (the strumpet briefly presented in *Inferno* XVIII) is "more alive and poetic than Beatrice as far as she is a mere allegory" and that Iago is "one of the most beautiful creatures of the poetic world."⁵² Mephisto is superior to Faust, hell to paradise. A virtuous woman is not a good subject for poetry,⁵³ since perfection or the ideal, for De Sanctis, is an abstraction and hence unpoetic.

The poet imposes form on matter, but there is often a conflict between matter or content, and form. De Sanctis postulates a perfect identity of form and content but only as a kind of limiting concept, an ideal. The identification has the consequence of equating content and form and making the terms interchangeable. "As the content, so the form."⁵⁴ "In poetry there is really neither form nor content, but as in nature, the one is the other." Paradoxically De Sanctis concludes that "the great poet annihilates the form so that it is itself the content."⁵⁵ "Content is thus not neglected. It

appears twice in the new criticism [= De Sanctis]: first, as natural and abstract, as it was; the second time, as form which it has become."⁵⁶ Usually De Sanctis operates not with an identification of the two terms but with a conflict between them. Matter can sometimes be so resistant that the poet fails to subdue it. In Dante's *Comedy* there remains "an abstract and pedantic base which resists all efforts of the imagination."⁵⁷ In Alfieri "the political and moral content is not a mere stimulus or occasion for artistic formation, but is its substance, and invades and spoils the work of art."⁵⁸ In the 18th century "content appears not as art, already formed and transfigured, but as if divided from art, anterior and superior to art."⁵⁹ Sometimes the content is conceived of as existing independently, demanding its form. "When the content exists, it knocks and knocks again, and in the long run it makes its way, and creates its own form."⁶⁰ But just as often form can somehow become independent, indifferent to any content, "a pure play of forms."⁶¹ At other times content and form are thought of as warring within the work of art itself. In Leopardi, we are told, there is a "disharmony of content and form,"⁶² or "an inner division in his poetic form," which gives a dramatic character to his lyrics—"laughter and tears, life and death."⁶³

De Sanctis recognizes that a work of art has an "argument" which is by no means a *tabula rasa* on which the poet can write; "it is rather a marble, already shaped and carved, which contains its own concepts and laws of development. The chief quality of genius is to understand its argument."⁶⁴ Argument is "a conditioned and determined matter containing in itself virtually its own poetics, that is, its organic laws, its concept, its parts, its form, its style."⁶⁵ De Sanctis even criticizes a poem because the author "has not seriously considered his argument."⁶⁶

Content, argument, or what we would call theme, generates the "situation." "Matter, in a concrete and determined position, acquires a character, becomes a 'situation.'"⁶⁷ Situation leads to "the unity of design, the structure and agreement of the parts." "It determines the appearance, the style [of a work of art]."⁶⁸ Sometimes situation refers to personality, the soul of the poet.⁶⁹ In other contexts "situation"

seems merely a synonym for genuine organic form. "Poems which do not come from the soul, from inside, but are a mechanical and artificial product, do not have 'situations' and therefore have no form in the elevated sense of the word."⁷⁰ Only rarely does the term mean something more specific. We are even told that a specific situation is "in-aesthetic, or incapable of representation."⁷¹ Foscolo's "Sepolcri" has a "genuine lyrical situation," shows "a soul in a determined condition, which sets in motion this inner world;" while, in contrast, his "Grazie" gives a history and metaphysics of this inner world and thus loses "situation," concreteness and ceases to be poetry.⁷² The term is thus an alternative for form, unity, individuality or concreteness. It comes from Hegel's *Aesthetics* where, in the section on the Ideal, it is discussed as one of the qualities of action.⁷³ Its implication of fixedness and stasis make it hardly useful for more complex works of art, and De Sanctis himself uses it extensively only in the *Essay on Petrarch* where he surveys the "situations" of various sonnets and *canzoni* or (to use a more familiar vocabulary) classifies the poems by themes. It is hard to see why the term should have recently been singled out as a great discovery central to De Sanctis' practice and capable of further application.⁷⁴

De Sanctis speaks much more frequently of the work of art as a special "world" and discusses fictional characters in terms of the opposition between the ideal and the real, the characteristic and the general, the image and the phantasm. De Sanctis always condemns the abstract ideal, the "perfect, dead ideal," but defends the ideal entering the real, fused and interpenetrated with it.⁷⁵ In Manzoni he admires this fusion of the ideal and the real and finds even in Zola "the living sentiment of the human ideal and the strong constructive and representative imagination" which make him a artist.⁷⁶ A fictional character should be "characteristic," his individuality should stand out, but precisely the more individual the character, the more completely is the ideal incorporated in him. Every individual has his ideal, even the bandits in *I promessi sposi*.⁷⁷ Contrary to his usual stress on the concretely individual and unique, De Sanctis would often recognize that great poets such as Dante and

Leopardi, "by raising their feelings to general significance succeeded in fusing into a single personality what in their soul is most peculiar and intimate with what in the concept is most extrinsic and abstract."⁷⁸

More frequently De Sanctis asserts that "image is the proper field of the poet."⁷⁹ Even higher than "image" is the "phantasm," which De Sanctis sometimes distinguishes from image on the grounds that there are two kinds of imagination, the lower *immaginazione*, which is mechanical and analytical, and the higher *fantasia*, which is organic and synthetic.⁸⁰ Once he defines "phantasm" as "this spiritualized image, that half reality."⁸¹ Boccaccio's *Filocolo* is criticized for giving us the image but not the "phantasm," those underlying meanings and shades which give us the feeling and music of things."⁸² Guerrazzi is condemned for "lacking the immediate and direct intuition of the phantasm."⁸³ Thus the true poet is dominated by his phantasm, lives in this world of *fantasia* and must forget himself in it. Instead of saying to his creature: "Arise and walk: . . . leaving it all its liberty as a person" Guerrazzi, the author of a bad historical novel on Beatrice Cenci, says, "You are my work: you belong to me."⁸⁴ "Phantasm" thus seems identical with the successful fictional character who must live his own life, must be seen objectively.

De Sanctis prefers objective to subjective art, the impersonal imagination of a Homer or Ariosto to the "manner" of subjective poets such as Petrarch or Tasso. Irony in the sense of destruction of illusion is condemned by De Sanctis. "In this smile, in this presence and awareness of the real, among the creations of genius, is the negative side of art, the germ of its dissolution and death."⁸⁵ Humor also seems to De Sanctis a negative art-form. It "has as its meaning, the destruction of the limit, together with an awareness of that destruction. It is the sentiment that nothing is true or serious, that every opinion is as good as any other."⁸⁶ Even the comic is not ranked with highest art. In an elaborate classification of the forms of the comic in Dante's *Inferno*, De Sanctis tries to establish some kind of scale of the comic, with buffoonery as the lowest and caricature as the highest form. But even higher than all forms of the comic is sarcasm,

"the door through which we turn our backs on the comic and enter again into great poetry."⁸⁷ Sarcasm must consume and purify itself, must become impersonal anger. Seriousness, passion, tragedy are to De Sanctis the highest forms of art.

De Sanctis cares little for traditional genre distinctions, as he always stresses the individual and the particular against the general and universal. But he does not reject the three main categories, lyric, epic and drama, and constantly operates with these terms either as basic psychological attitudes or as historical forms. Epic is for De Sanctis the earliest art form. It "draws its life from the intimate center of a nation."⁸⁸ It implies a traditional history, a social atmosphere in which the poet lives. Dante's *Ugolino* is considered epic, "primitive and integral epic, into which lyric and drama have not yet penetrated,"⁸⁹ and the Napoleon of Manzoni's ode on his death ("*Il Cinque Maggio*") is also epic.⁹⁰ *Farinata* is "still the epic stuff of man, not the dramatic. There is eloquence, but the inner life of the soul is lacking."⁹¹ Thus drama means to De Sanctis the highest form of art, as it is action, liberty, free personality. "Without human liberty, poetry, not to mention drama, is destroyed."⁹² Necessity, lack of freedom, is to De Sanctis always "prose." Thus Satan frozen into the icy sea at the bottom of Hell is "an absolutely prosaic character."⁹³ The lyric is for De Sanctis the last stage of art. "Art dies in a lyrical accent, in a musical sigh. The lyric, music, are the last forms of art."⁹⁴ All literary history is seen in the large categories of epic, drama and lyric, but with a changed order, compared to Hegel's where drama comes last. But the minor genre forms are never discussed as such in De Sanctis. Only the sonnet is singled out as "the poem of a quarter of an hour," similar to spatial art, which has the advantage of being "better able to represent the simultaneous than the successive."⁹⁵

But such a reflection on outer form is very rare indeed. One finds occasional remarks on sound effects, or on the role of a stress on the sixth and seventh syllable in a sonnet by Petrarch, or on the Italian decasyllable in Berchet or on the disappearance of rhyme and stanza in Foscolo's

"Sepolcri."⁹⁶ A well-known passage on the classical period in Boccaccio assumes a contradiction of form and content: Boccaccio's world "would be intolerable, would be deeply disgusting, but art clothes its nakedness in these ample Latin forms as in a veil blown by lascivious winds."⁹⁷ But much more frequently De Sanctis recognizes the unity of content and form, of style and subject matter, only in order to ignore the second term of the dichotomy. Style is "not constructed, *a priori*. It is the consequence of a given way of conceiving, feeling and imagining."⁹⁸ It is not "an arbitrary, isolated phenomenon." It is in "intimate connection with the whole design of the composition." But De Sanctis strongly opposes the dictum that "style is the man." It is rather the "argument," the thing, the subject matter, "the expression which takes its substance and its character from the thing it wants to express."¹⁰⁰ To De Sanctis, outer form and style are ideally indistinguishable. "The form is a mirror which makes you pass immediately to the image so that you do not notice that there is a glass between you."¹⁰¹ "This transparency of form consists in its annihilation, when it becomes a simple transmission and does not attract the eye to itself. It is like a mirror in which you do not stop at the glass . . . It is limpidity. Limpid water is water that allows you, as if it were not there, to see the bottom. Limpid form allows the object to emerge from it without attracting the reader's attention."¹⁰² Objectivity thus is imperceptibility of form, undistorted "imitation." "The motto of a serious art is: let's speak little ourselves and let the things speak much. *Sunt lacrimae rerum*."¹⁰³ It is high praise when De Sanctis says of Leopardi that he "forgets the word," that the "word is for him nothing but an instrument . . . a diaphanous medium in which the thought is reflected in all its limpidity and clearness."¹⁰⁴ De Sanctis sees through glass. The supposed "formalist" actually studies feelings and characters, arguments and situations. Form with De Sanctis is really inner form or *eidos*, a term which oscillates, in the neo-Platonic tradition, between two meanings, the Platonic "idea" and the Aristotelian forming principle.

Similarly, the aesthetician who defends the autonomy of art rejects "art for art's sake" as "an excessive form-

ula.”¹⁰⁵ It is true only in the sense that art is the aim of art. “The bird sings in order to sing; well and good. But the singing bird expresses his whole self . . . A man singing also expresses his whole self. It is not sufficient to be an artist, he must be a man.”¹⁰⁶ Throughout De Sanctis’ works the whole man is contrasted with the partial man, the “poet” with the “artist.” His ideal is a sort of humanism in which art plays only a role subordinate to the totality of man’s strivings for rational, ethical, religious and philosophical ideals. De Sanctis’ greatest work, *The History of Italian Literature* (1870-71) is a history of the Italian conscience, “conscience” being the center of total man, just as “imagination” is the central faculty of the artist. The historical scheme underlying the book is implicit also in many of the individual *Saggi critici*. Several of the essays must be considered as elaborations of points in the *History*, even though they may have been published before the actual writing of the great synthetic work. Also, the lecture courses given at Naples when De Sanctis held the Chair of Comparative Literature (1871-76), which trace Italian literary history in the early 19th century, must be treated as continuation of the *History* and its scheme. This scheme had early crystallized in De Sanctis’ mind. Only the lecture courses given in his private school at Naples (1839-48) before his long prison term and his banishment can be dismissed as immature and largely derivative. From the time of his exile in Turin and Zurich (1854-60), all his work is dominated by this general scheme which cannot be interpreted as a concession to the times or as a mere pedagogical device to link the individual chapters of the *History* on the great Italian writers. On the other hand, one cannot call the scheme “sociological,” as hardly any attempt is made in the *History* to show a causal relationship between social change and literature. There are occasional remarks which assume that literature is a social document: De Sanctis recommends, for example, that we study Renaissance comedies to “penetrate the mysteries of that Italian corruption,”¹⁰⁷ or tells us that in Boccaccio “this society, unchanged, is introduced into the *Decameron*, as it were, caught red-handed in the act of life.”¹⁰⁸ He can also proclaim his general adherence to the saying that “lit-

erature is an expression of society." "Art is something more than individual caprice; art, like religion and philosophy, like political and administrative institutions, is an intrinsic part of society, a natural result of culture and of national life."¹⁰⁹ But here, and throughout the book, no naturalistic determinism is assumed: rather, the hero of the book is a unitary national spirit or conscience whose bearer and ideal is the total man, both religious and moral, who, if he is an artist, has high imagination to express this conscience. Italian literature is used not as a document to study the changes of Italian society nor is the social change studied in order to throw light on the literature, but rather the assumption is made that Italian literature constitutes the very essence, or the summary of Italian history itself. De Sanctis does not write *Kulturgeschichte*: he barely alludes to political or social events or situations; he practically ignores the other arts and expressly refuses to write a history of Italian philosophy.¹¹⁰ In his *History* literature itself, without any need of comparison with political, social or art history, enacts a great spiritual drama: the fall and the redemption of Italy.

The developmental scheme is not one of simple progress or decline. It is not exhaustively described by De Sanctis when he defined the "ruling principal" of his *History* as "the successive rehabilitation of matter, a gradual coming closer to nature and the real."¹¹¹ The change from the ideal to the real, from transcendence to immanence, is one of the themes of the *History*, but is it not the only nor is it the dominant one. It is far more complex and can best be described by briefly going through the stages of the scheme.

De Sanctis begins—in rather lame introductory chapters which suffer most from gaps in information and lack of sympathy—by describing the main themes and genres of early Italian medieval literature: chivalry, the love-lyric, scholastic learning, visions, mystery-plays, political chronicles, all of which Dante is said to have synthesized and exalted in the *Divine Comedy*. Dante is the first great Italian poet, a total human being, a man, an imagination: "the beautiful unity of Dante who saw life in the harmony achieved through love, intellect and act."¹¹² Dante has all the human and poetic virtues: faith, the "preliminary and

necessary condition of poetry,"¹¹³ sincerity, truth, a vivid sense of reality, the ardent passion of the patriot, and high imagination. But he is, in De Sanctis' view, too much implicated in his age: too medieval. He has an obsolete transcendental view of the world which puts the aim of life into the hereafter, he has a false intellectualistic concept of poetry which makes him invent a world of allegories and symbols. He has a static concept of human personality and knowledge which does not allow him to create free moving human beings or to think independently of his authorities. The *Comedy* is seen as the result of a conflict between the poet in Dante who created such human beings as Francesca da Rimini, Farinata and Ugolino, and the philosopher or rather scholar who expounded without question an inherited doctrine in shadowy lifeless allegories. "But Dante was a poet, and he rebels against allegory."¹¹⁴ "This artistic world, born from a contradiction between intention of the poet and his work, is not thoroughly harmonious, is not pure poetry."¹¹⁵ De Sanctis recognizes that the other world and the earthly world are, in Dante, indivisible and correlative, that his human beings with their passions, vices and virtues remain human, though eternized, in the other world. But this eternizing, this rigidifying into statues, is to De Sanctis also one of Dante's limitations. "These mighty figures standing on their pedestals, rigid and epic like statues, are waiting for the artist who will take them by the hand and throw them into the turmoil of life, and make them dramatic beings. And that artist was not an Italian: he was Shakespeare."¹¹⁶ In this imaginary continuity to Shakespeare, the *Inferno* must be greatly preferred to the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, and even within the *Inferno* a regress of life is evident. There is a constant diminishing of life and hence of poetry from the great individualities of the upper Hell to the groups of sinners in Malebolge and finally to its extinction in the ice of the lowest circles. "The Devil vanishes at the door of Purgatory and the flesh dies—and with the flesh, a good deal of the poetry disappears also."¹¹⁷ De Sanctis describes *Purgatory* almost entirely in terms of images, paintings and sculpture, dreams and visions, as a world of quiet affection, of melancholy, resignation, as a

lyrical effusion of pain, hope and love. In the *Paradiso* "we reach the final dissolution of form. It was bodily and material in the *Inferno*, picturesque and fantastic in the *Purgatorio*, here it is lyrical and musical: the immanent appearance of spirit, absolute light without content, not spirit itself but its covering and boundary."¹¹⁸ In the final vision of God, Dante has words but not the form. His intellect is still alive but his imagination, which had lighted him like a torch, has gone. "High fantasy' loses its power, and with the death of imagination poetry dies too."¹¹⁹ Dante is the great ancestor, the wellspring of Italian poetry. But he was also representative of his time: the Middle Ages which to De Sanctis are a way of life and thought from which man has finally freed himself for his own good.

After Dante there comes decline and fall, the fragmentation of the human being, the decline of high imagination, the shriveling of the great ethical substance, but also a rise, a liberation from the shackles of the Middle Ages, a new humanity and new, more humane, art. Both in the brief chapter of the *History* devoted to Petrarch and in the earlier book, *Saggio critico sul Petrarca* (1869) which is based on lectures delivered at Zurich in 1858-59, De Sanctis sees Petrarch as the artist (in contrast to the poet Dante) who has lost the totality of the greater man: lost his content and acquired the cult of form for form's sake. Petrarch's world is much narrower than Dante's: it is an inner world of a solitary and contemplative nature. But this inner world is, in De Sanctis' scheme, somehow more real, more human than Dante's. In apparent contradiction to earlier pronouncements about Dante, De Sanctis declares that with Petrarch "man is found,"¹²⁰ that in him "the real appears for the first time in art"¹²¹ and that we detect "the dawn of reality" in the very contradictions of Petrarch's mind.¹²² Petrarch, to De Sanctis' regret, did not, however, free himself completely from the world of the Middle Ages. He seems like a man pulled here and there by contrary currents. His intellect still belongs to the Middle Ages and his feeling, original and new as it is, is a resigned and weak melancholy. De Sanctis ignores or dismisses the humanist and politician and concentrates only on the *Canzoniere* (with a short disparag-

ing treatment of the *Trionfi*). The Italian poems are discussed in terms of this psychological conflict between spirit and flesh: with the spiritualism considered "not an aspiration, but an obstacle which Petrarch cannot overcome."¹²³ The medieval spiritualism survives in personifications, reflections and allegories, in the part of the poetry which lacks reality and concreteness. This, to De Sanctis, is the dead part of Petrarch, while Petrarch brooding tenderly and sensuously over the dead Laura is alive and new. Though De Sanctis constantly appeals to the criterion of "sincerity" he well understands that this does not concern the empirical biography of the author. He completely dismisses all questions as to the identity and historicity of Laura. "I confess that I cannot answer such or similar questions for the simple reason that I don't know and that Petrarch has not taken me into his confidence."¹²⁴ Petrarch's individual human sentiment and his concern for form are his great historical contributions, but they were achieved at a price. "Dante who ought to have been the beginning of a whole literature, was the end of one. His world, so perfect on its surface, was divided and feeble within, and was merely artistic contemplation where once it had been faith and feeling."¹²⁵

Petrarch is a figure of transition: with Boccaccio we are in another world. A revolution has been accomplished. The Middle Ages are not only rejected, they are laughed at.¹²⁶ The world of transcendence has disappeared. Here is a secular world, real, natural, a parody of the *Comedy*, "an anti-Comedy," a human Comedy.¹²⁷ It is a cynical, malicious world of the flesh, gross in its feelings, but polished and embellished by fancy.¹²⁸ God's providence has disappeared from it and nothing but pure chance remains, and its result: "adventures," "extraordinary cases" which might be tragic but are so in a very different, external and superficial sense. No ideal remains but a certain liberality and gentility of the soul, and an observance of social customs called "honor."¹²⁹ What remains of the immense shipwreck of conscience is a sense of literary integrity, of artistic feeling and the irony of the artist: the comic ideal implied. "The motive of the comedy does not, however, come from the

moral world, but from the intellectual world." It is "culture blossoming for the first time, and conscious of itself, turning the ignorance and malice of the lower classes into a joke."¹³⁰ Art is the only thing in life that Boccaccio feels seriously about: he is "a writer but not a man."¹³¹ He is thus the wellspring of decadence, of the enfeeblement of Italian conscience. The whole of the Renaissance is seen as a development from Boccaccio.

Renaissance, for De Sanctis, means formalism, artistry, divorce between form and content. Content becomes indifferent; "what matters is not what one has to say but how to say it."¹³² The whole Humanist movement remains on the surface: "it does not come from the people and it does not descend to the people."¹³³ In the greatest poet of the 15th century, Poliziano, there is only the sense of form and a voluptuous dream of the Golden Age. Ariosto escapes into a world of mere fancy which is saved from complete emptiness only by his "adult, materialist, realist spirit, incredulous, ironical [which] amuses itself at the expense of its fancy."¹³⁴ But De Sanctis has an enormous (in view of his scheme, somewhat incongruous) admiration for the art of Ariosto and defended him sharply against objections, made by Cesare Cantù on grounds of probability, historical accuracy and morality.¹³⁵ De Sanctis sings the praises of Ariosto's objectivity and clarity with which he depicts his golden dream, his enchanted castle; but he denies him any "sentiment of fatherland, family, humanity, and even love and honor."¹³⁶ He can sympathetically describe even the cynical *Maccaronea* of Folengo and give an account of the venal and depraved Aretino which does not fail to single out his acute modern sensibility, yet they must both symbolize the further descent of the Italian conscience. It logically led to a loss of independence and to a long stagnation, during the Counter-Reformation, in the backwaters of Europe. The one great poet of that age, Torquato Tasso, is, like Petrarch, a sick man who felt the pain of two worlds and was unable to reconcile them. He is lyrical, subjective, elegiac, sentimental, incapable of reaching the heroic. "His seriousness, like his religion, is superficial and literary." "He seeks the epic and finds the lyric; he seeks the true or

the real and creates the fantastic; he seeks history and meets up with his own soul."¹³⁷ After Tasso there came only Marino, *marinismo*, "the corpse" of Tasso and Petrarch.¹³⁸

But in the gloom of the Renaissance there is one ray of light; one great man who, single-handed and lonely rejected both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Machiavelli. He knew that the mission of man is on this earth, that his prime duty is patriotism, the glory, greatness and freedom of his fatherland. Machiavelli is a man completely emancipated from the supernatural world who, in difference from artists around him, has found a new content. He has discovered the program of the modern world: intellect, the science of man, the nation, the state, progress and the future.¹³⁹ With Machiavelli the redemption of Italy begins. But he was alone in his time: Guicciardini is merely an intellectual, an ineffective egotist whose ideal man, described also in a special essay,¹⁴⁰ is the man without ideals, the utilitarian, the indifferent modern individualist.

While Italian literature descends into the trough of Marinism and its continuation in the equally empty pastoral "Arcadia," individual philosophers and scientists,—Bruno, Campanella, Galileo and later Vico—prepare the new content of the future literature, the "new science." Bruno discovers the "organic method," the very essence of science.¹⁴¹ Vico discovers history as a science, and criticism which is neither dogmatism nor skepticism.¹⁴² But these Italians were persecuted or were, like Vico, bookish professors in a library. The intellectual movement passed rather to France and England where it became a great historical force. Italian literature of the 17th century is "empty of passion and action and empty of conscience,"¹⁴³ without even a consciousness of its decadence. The last poet of the old literature is Metastasio whom De Sanctis—as often with pure artists—appreciates highly for his clarity and harmony but whom he considers the end of a line: just before the dissolution of poetry into music.¹⁴⁴ For music is to De Sanctis mere form, without ideas or images, the last stage of Italian decadence. "The old literature had found its tomb in music."¹⁴⁵ Music is the only contribution of Southern Italy even as late as the early 19th century. "Here was our genius!" exclaims

De Sanctis, alluding to Bellini and Donizetti.¹⁴⁶ The tone of regret and even contempt is obvious.

But the regeneration, at least in the North, was on the way by the middle of the 18th century. The revolt against empty form begins with Goldoni, the Galileo of the new literature.¹⁴⁷ He restored reality and the word (which is neither music nor the empty word of "Arcadia"). Unfortunately he still lacked "an inner world of conscience," "sincerity and force of convictions."¹⁴⁸ Only with Parini "is man reborn" (in contrast to the mere artist). "Content is to him the substance of art, and the artist is to him the man in his integrity, as patriot, believer, philosopher, lover and friend." "Poetry has regained its ancient meaning and is again the voice of the inner world." "The form itself becomes the idea, a harmony of idea and expression."¹⁴⁹ A special essay on Parini elaborates this conception, with some reservations as to Parini's ironic, bookish, imitative, neo-classical forms, in order to conclude that "the man was worth more than the artist."¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Alfieri had the new moral and political content, the fire of the soul, yet somehow he failed to achieve the proper form, remained in a world of abstractions: his hatred of tyranny is too individualistic, his patriotism too abstract. "He lacks the science of life."¹⁵¹ But De Sanctis, in his early writings, had defended Alfieri against the disparagements of foreign critics (Veuillot, Janin, Gervinus),¹⁵² showing that his ideals were those of his time, that his classicism was not mere rhetoric but the classicism which also inspired the French revolution, and that his tragedies are not comparable to Racine's but have another aim and another form. Still, in Alfieri the new content has not yet achieved its organic form. Even Foscolo has achieved it only once: in the "Sepolcri" which announces the resurrection of the inner world, the return of religion to a "people oscillating between hypocrisy and negation."¹⁵³ Foscolo's other works, discussed at length in a special essay, do not achieve totality. *Jacopo Ortis* lacks analysis, the fulness and variety of real life. "You hear a single chord, the orchestra is lacking. Above all, grace, delicacy, suavity, a certain inner measure and peace are lacking, wherein lies the secret of life." The

"Grazie" is not poetry but a lecture with poetic embellishments.¹⁵⁴

Only with Manzoni has the new literature come into its own: here the content is restored in full, the ideal and the real reconciled. Manzoni—as the series of essays and lectures show—is for De Sanctis the crucial figure of the new Italy. His religion is interpreted as a democratization and humanization of Christianity: as "liberty, equality, fraternity, evangelized."¹⁵⁵ In *I Promessi Sposi*, "this ideal world is enveloped in a historical world, which gives all the illusion of a full and concrete existence, becomes its true living center, the unity of the whole work."¹⁵⁶ De Sanctis, however, condemns Manzoni's poetics and his final rejection of the historical novel. Manzoni is an artist in spite of his system. The ideal is realized in his work and it is "the purest and at the same time, the most modern of all ideals, not of the reaction but of the Restoration of Europe."¹⁵⁷ *I Promessi Sposi* is one of those masterworks which in the history of art inaugurate a new era, the era of the real, a monument next to the *Divina Commedia* and the *Orlando Furioso*.¹⁵⁸

Alongside Manzoni stands only the great solitary Leopardi. He was De Sanctis' favorite poet in his youth; throughout his life he commented on him and to him he devoted his last unfinished book, a close genetic and even biographical study of Leopardi. De Sanctis sees Leopardi as heralding a new age, the end of theology and metaphysics, the aridly true, the really real. But Leopardi's skepticism leaves his moral world inviolate. This tenacious life of his inner world, in spite of the death of every philosophical and metaphysical world, is the original quality of Leopardi, and gives his skepticism the stamp of religion.¹⁵⁹ In an eloquent passage at the end of an early, highly critical and even satirical exposition of Schopenhauer's philosophy,¹⁶⁰ De Sanctis had suggested this positive side of Leopardi. "He does not believe in progress, and he makes you yearn for it: he does not believe in liberty, and he makes you love it. Love, virtue, glory he calls illusions, and he kindles in your breast an inexhaustible passion for them . . . He is a skeptic and he makes you a believer—and while he calls

all life empty and deceptive, you somehow feel more firmly attached to all that in life is noble and great."¹⁶¹ The contrast between the cold and negative intellect and the warm heart yearning for the ideal is the central theme of the late book. "This dualism is the dynamic force of Leopardi's poetry, the lever which sets it in motion and makes of it an original organism."¹⁶² De Sanctis thus minimizes the philosophical poems and the prose and emphasizes the idylls, finding even an "almost childish good nature in their profundity."¹⁶³

The remainder of Italian literature of the 19th century is divided by De Sanctis into two groups: the liberal and the democratic school: the liberal Catholic school embraces the followers of Manzoni, the democratic school is headed by Mazzini. The division often seems arbitrary but serves the purpose of emphasizing the political alignment of the authors, especially since De Sanctis in these late lectures includes many publicists, historians and philosophers (Rosmini, Gioberti) in largely ideological discussions. Here and in several early essays De Sanctis musters contemporary literature and severely handles the imitators of the masters: F. D. Guerrazzi for a sensational novel on Beatrice Cenci, Padre Bresciani for a Jesuitical historical romance, *L'Ebreo di Verona*, and Giovanni Prati for his pretentious pseudo-Faustian epics.¹⁶⁴ De Sanctis saw the exhaustion of the romantic tradition and, late in life, sought for a remedy in the rise of naturalism. He wrote favorably on Zola, praising his objectivity, his social concern, defending his morality and welcoming his exposure of the corruption of Second Empire France.¹⁶⁵ But disturbed by the rapid spread of naturalism and positivistic science, he tried, in the last years of his life, to restore the balance. He lectured on the need of the ideal and deplored the new "animalism," the cult of force, the usurpations of science.¹⁶⁶ Consistently throughout his mature work De Sanctis upholds a humanism which is ethical and realistic in the sense of a rejection of the abstractness of neoclassicism and the cloudiness of fantastic romanticism. He felt that such "realism" — filled with an ethical pathos salvaged from Christianity—is an excellent antidote "for a fantastic race, fond of phrase-

making and display, educated in Arcadia and rhetoric.”¹⁶⁷

Thus, a historical vision which has a practical end inspires all of De Sanctis’ work. The great *History* concludes with an exhortation to Italians: “The new century can already be seen taking shape within the old. When it comes we must not be found last in line, nor even in the second place.”¹⁶⁸ The *History* traces both a fall and a slow reconstruction, and points to the future. There is no unilateral progress, at least in literature, for De Sanctis. Rather, an original totality breaks up and is again reunited. Content and form, fused in Dante at his best, dissolves to be fused again in Manzoni and Leopardi. But the false transcendence of the Middle Ages gives way to reality. An empty formalist art-for-art’s-sake literature—from Boccaccio to Metastasio—is finally replaced by one inspired by life and the nation; a literature of the learned or the upper classes becomes one comprehensible to the people, speaking with its voice. There is in De Sanctis’ scheme a strong secular immanentism, a trust in progress, in development, in the march of mind which is almost as fateful as Providence. There seems no possibility of revolt against the *Zeitgeist*. In the 15th century no drama could arise not because Italians have no dramatic genius, but because “that light-hearted and sensual world could not give you anything else than the idyllic and the comic.”¹⁶⁹ In the 16th century Italy no longer had the power to produce the heroic or the tragic. “Nothing shows more the frivolous basis of Italian life than these vain attempts of Tasso to achieve seriousness. Whether he wanted to or not, he remains a follower of Ariosto.”¹⁷⁰ Similarly, Marino could not help being the “corrupter of his age.” Rather, the age corrupted him, or more exactly, “there were no corrupters and no corrupted. The age was that way and could not be any other. It was the necessary consequence of no less necessary premises. Marino was the genius of his age, the age itself in the great force and clarity of its expression.”¹⁷¹ Even the Jesuits who represent the “intellect in its ultimate depravation,” were both the cause and the effect of the corruption, and therefore still “were a progress, a natural result of history.”¹⁷² Romanticism which De Sanctis usually condemns as reaction, is still “a serious movement of the

spirit, according to the eternal laws of history."¹⁷³

Complementary to De Sanctis' trust in the *Weltgeist* and *Zeitgeist*, the march of history, the spirit of the age, is his trust in the people, in the *Volksgeist*. The people are called "the unappealable judge of poetry."¹⁷⁴ De Sanctis never fails to buttress his views by the popularity of a work or figure, and at one point he even considers popularity proof of absolute aesthetic value. Speaking of Metastasio he says "that no other poet was so popular, no other poet has so deeply penetrated into the spirit of the people. There is then in his dramas an absolute value, superior to the passing moment, a value which even the dissolvent criticism of the 19th century has not destroyed."¹⁷⁵ But this trust in the people should not be confused with a belief in popular poetry or in folklore: De Sanctis recognizes that so-called popular literature is in a state of petrification, is literature descended to the people rather than rising out of it.¹⁷⁶ His ideal of a popular literature, "drawn from the heart of the nation,"¹⁷⁷ implies rather the belief that the great poet is the voice of the people and the age. "Ariosto and Dante are the two standard-bearers of two opposed civilizations . . . the syntheses in which their times were completed and closed."¹⁷⁸ Especially in the early essays a strong historical relativism prevails. We must judge according to the spirit of the time and not by extraneous criteria: we must not make a retroactive judgment, nor transport into the past the needs and ideas of the present.¹⁷⁹

But this is precisely what De Sanctis does. His "historicism" is constantly modified by this consciousness of the need of his time and the future. History for him is contemporary history. If we criticize his scheme (even accepting its basic assumptions), the distortion of the Renaissance will strike us most sharply. His views seem impoverished by failure to recognize Italian achievements in the plastic arts (despite some allusions to Michelangelo, Raphael and Da Vinci) and by his strange conception of music as empty sound.¹⁸⁰ The Renaissance is seen as a purely literary phenomenon and even its literary achievement is seen as mere form, rhetoric or fancy, while whole strands of these times (e. g. the Platonic academy) are slighted

or ignored. Machiavelli and Bruno are taken out of their context in order to be made precursors of the New Science. In spite of its Vichian associations and De Sanctis' great admiration for Vico, the New Science means to him, in practice, merely the Enlightenment conceived in the simplified terms of a progress from Bacon to Darwin. The Counter-Reformation is condemned as a time of mere naturalism with a hypocritical varnish.¹⁸¹ De Sanctis, like his time, has no taste for the Baroque. Up to the 18th century De Sanctis had hardly alluded in his *History* to foreign influences and he had treated even the revival of the classics only in the most general terms. But now he suddenly shifts attention to international intellectual history, sketching the development from Descartes to Rousseau and the rise of European romanticism. The perspective, however, seems false when Manzoni is given the role of the initiator of realism. *I Promessi Sposi* (however fine a book) does not deserve the key-position assigned to it by De Sanctis. But there is little point in taking issue with the details of De Sanctis' scheme and judgments. His triumph is the success with which he has integrated concrete criticism into this historical scheme. The historical scheme, with its dialectics of content and form, ideality and reality, transcendence and immanence, poetry and artistry, enters directly into the concrete criticism. In almost every case—Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Machiavelli, Tasso, Parini, Alfieri, Foscolo, Manzoni, Leopardi and many others—De Sanctis has posed the problems of criticism which have since been elaborated and debated by Italian critics.¹⁸²

Strangely enough, in a review of Luigi Settembrini's *History of Italian Literature* (1869), written when De Sanctis was working on his own book, he seems to envisage some kind of distant synthesis of knowledge: to be the immense labor of an entire generation. "It will be possible when there is a monograph or study about every epoch and every important writer which will say the last word and solve all questions."¹⁸³ But such a positivistic ideal of accumulation of knowledge postponed to a distant future, was actually quite alien to his mind. He must have felt that he was able to provide a proper synthesis single-handed; certainly no-

body can deny his wide erudition in Italian literary history and his close knowledge of the great texts. His errors are quite minor¹⁸⁴ and the gaps in his knowledge and the distortions of perspective are rather due to the state of knowledge in his time and to De Sanctis' scheme of values than to any personal ignorance. He knew that literary history is not merely a summary of knowledge. What is needed, he pleads, is a philosophy of art. "We do not yet know what is literature and what is form."¹⁸⁵ We lack also "a history of criticism, one of the important works still to be done."¹⁸⁶ We need a "history also of the criteria by which writers and artists have been guided. Every writer has his aesthetics in his head, a certain special way of conceiving art, and his predilections in method of conceptions."¹⁸⁷ Such a history is evolutionary. "History, like nature, does not proceed by jumps; progressive steps generate at last the great poet who gives a definite form to the whole series. Thus Dante is the great poet of religious visions; Petrarch the great poet of the troubadours; Ariosto put the last touches on the chivalric series."¹⁸⁸ The early lectures, *La poesia cavalleresca* (1858-59), trace "a genuine progression" to the summit of Ariosto,¹⁸⁹ just as in the *History* he traces an evolutionary scheme of alienation and reconstitution, believing, as he says, in "the poetical Real which I call Form, the living Reason taken in the act of life, Reason-History."¹⁹⁰ Nothing is further from his mind than a Crocean denial of the possibility of literary history, for he thinks all the time in totalities and continuities, sometimes in ways which offend our sense of reality. Thus Dante is said to have had his successors outside of Italy because no figures in Italian literature, created after Ugolino, show such family feeling.¹⁹¹ Thus Dante's earthly paradise is "the stuff from which later the Spanish drama was to arise."¹⁹² Thus *Gerusalemme Liberata* contains "the presentiment of a new poetry which one day will be called *I Promessi Sposi*."¹⁹³ Taken as literary history, such relationships are merely fanciful: but they must be seen as analogies in the totality of a historical scheme where everything hangs together and even melts into one great unity.

This unity is obviously Hegelian: Reason-History, spirit

as development. Surely the concept of history in De Sanctis remained Hegelian—in a liberal interpretation, like that of the Hegelian Left—all his life, even if the scheme of Italian literature seems to be drawn rather from Edgar Quinet's *Les Revolutions d'Italie* (1848).¹⁹⁴ In Quinet we find the same interpretation of Italian history in terms of a conflict between conscience and art and even the position of Dante and Petrarch, Machiavelli and Tasso in the general scheme are identical. But Quinet hardly wrote *literary* criticism: his book is rather a dirge over Italian decadence, a meditation on Italian history. It is vaguely Hegelian in its view that all art is the manifestation of religion and history the road to freedom.

On aesthetic and critical questions De Sanctis, however, reacted sharply against orthodox Hegelianism. The early lecture course (1845-46) on the history of criticism contains an exposition of Hegel's aesthetics, which De Sanctis read in the French translation. While in prison (1850-53) De Sanctis studied German, made lengthy extracts from Hegel's *Logic* and translated the Hegelian *Allgemeine Geschichte der Poesie* by Karl Rosenkranz.¹⁹⁵ But in Zurich, where he had contacts with F. T. Vischer, whose *Aesthetik* he must have read, at least in part, he came to reject Hegelian aesthetics. He wrote a rather elaborate criticism (which remained unpublished) charging Hegel with the intellectualistic misunderstanding of art. De Sanctis recognizes that Hegel himself had fine taste and that he kept within certain just limits which were exceeded by his disciples. But the system pressed Hegel to seek the idea in the form even though he knew the organic unity of idea and form. "His major glory was to have loftily proclaimed the contemporaneity of the two terms in the spirit of the poet, and to have located the excellence of art in the personal unity, in which the idea is encased and almost forgotten. Nobody speaks more than he of the individual and of incarnation . . . but because of his system this free and poetic individual is, in fact, an individual-manifestation, or to speak with the language now in fashion, the transparent veil of the idea; the principal, the important thing is always the thing manifested."¹⁹⁶ Hegel admits that ideas in art are no longer idea, but form, not the general,

but the particular; yet in practice, the particular of Hegel becomes "a veil of the general, his form an appearance of the idea." "The content, the inner significance, the idea, the conception is the calamity of the Hegelian critic." As an example De Sanctis quotes the interpretation of Goethe's *Iphigenie* as a kind of allegory of the triumph of civilization over barbarism.¹⁹⁷ De Sanctis, one sees, feels that he has grasped the original insights of Hegel from which Hegel and especially the Hegelians deviated at their peril. De Sanctis' dissatisfaction with the drearily schematic *History* of Rosenkranz and the "unaesthetic" *Aesthetik* of F. T. Vischer¹⁹⁸ is justified, even though it may exaggerate the gulf between De Sanctis and Hegel who, at his best, recognized the concreteness of art as well as De Sanctis himself. De Sanctis, especially in later years, saw that the Hegelian system had crumbled under the impact of modern science. He felt more strongly his own affinity with a tradition which could be called loosely Vichian. De Sanctis himself, however, thought of Vico's literary criticism as intellectualistic: "he looked in art for ideas and types."¹⁹⁹ De Sanctis did not know Herder but knew Kant and Schiller who had first defined the autonomy of art, the unity of form and content. He usually disparaged the Schlegels though they had most clearly reasserted these very doctrines. De Sanctis recognized the enormous influence of August Wilhelm Schlegel in changing literary criteria, in exalting Shakespeare and Calderon and disparaging French tragedy. He calls A. W. Schlegel "the founder of a new criticism:" he knows that the Schlegels have the merit of making the aim of art art itself, and that they (together with Madame de Staël) saw literature as an expression of society.²⁰⁰ But De Sanctis, while sharing their rejection of the unities, severely trounced August Wilhelm's comparison between the two Phaedras as a relapse into the old-fashioned rhetorical criticism which misunderstands the essence of art.²⁰¹ He always thought the whole debate about classicism and romanticism obsolete polemics. His sympathy for the Schlegels was necessarily imperfect, as he saw them far too exclusively as spokesmen of the European reaction and even classed the skeptical

August Wilhelm with the "fanatical panegyrists" of Christianity.²⁰²

Oddly enough, De Sanctis considered Hegel as proponent of an unhistorical view of art, as wanting art to be considered outside of space and time.²⁰³ Thus he often contrasts German philosophical *a priori* criticism with French historical and psychological criticism. The German school concentrates on the concept and has the air of a dissertation; the French school tarries complacently over the historical form and sticks to narrative.²⁰⁴ In practice, De Sanctis, however, makes finer distinctions among the French critics: he always dismisses old-fashioned rhetorical criticism such as La Harpe's,²⁰⁵ and elaborately attacks what he calls "the criticism of parallels" of Saint-Marc Girardin.²⁰⁶ De Sanctis ridicules his method of confronting, for instance, Corneille's Horatius with Hugo's Triboulet as examples of fatherly love. Girardin compares the incomparable: he measures individualities against an abstract moral ideal. But while De Sanctis goes so far as to say that he "hates the criticism of parallels,"²⁰⁷ he confines his hatred to this specific rhetorical method derived from Chateaubriand. De Sanctis' own criticism is itself constantly "comparative:" but he compares totalities, works, poets like Dante and Boccaccio, Ariosto and Tasso, in order to characterize and to individualize, and not, like Girardin, in order to moralize about fictional characters or prove the superiority of the classics over the romantics. Of the historical French critics De Sanctis valued Villemain most highly. His *History of Eighteenth Century Literature* is praised for the skill with which principles and judgments are suggested in what seems merely straightforward narration. Still, Villemain is pronounced to be without creative power and without vigor: "a man of letters in the old sense of the word to whom rhetoric, the art of speaking well, matters most."²⁰⁸ De Sanctis casually alludes to Taine's "exaggerated" theory of milieu.²⁰⁹ We hear nothing, in detail, of the French "psychological" critics. Sainte-Beuve is mentioned only three times for his "defective and mediocre" essay on Leopardi.²¹⁰ Alfred Mézières' book on Petrarch is considered a warning example of psychological criticism. "The author is isolated from his work and versed in the

facts of his life, in his defects and virtues, in his qualities. A more or less exact judgment of the man, but not of the work, can come of it."²¹¹

But in spite of this disparagement of French psychological criticism many of De Sanctis' own most successful essays must be described as "psychological." The essay on Racine's *Phèdre* rejects all abstract requirements about probability, historical color and morality, concluding that "a tragedy may have all these traits and still be utterly mediocre."²¹² What matters is that Racine has created a living character, a woman alive in all her contradictions and vacillations. The criticism is purely an analysis of the psychology of *Phèdre*: the play as a play is neglected and the mythical setting is dismissed as mere trappings. The realistic taste of the 19th century, which would make Racine something like a forerunner of Sardou or Ibsen, determines the whole conception. Similarly, Hugo's *Contemplations* are vividly described, both as to ideology and technique of antitheses and correspondences, in a brilliant essay. But De Sanctis concludes by expressing his preference for the poems about children and family, against what surely is to us Hugo's far greater poetry of dark and cloudy vistas into eternity.²¹³

Moreover, the highly admired essays on character in the *Inferno* are mainly psychological and often frankly evocative. They all start by removing obstacles to proper comprehension, by dismissing historical and allegorical interpretations. They all center on a psychological analysis of the characters and an explanation of the poet's attitude toward them. Thus De Sanctis defines the character of Francesca da Rimini: her passion and shame, her feminine tenderness and Dante's pity and knowledge of her sin.²¹⁴ The Farinata essay re-traces the action, explaining how Dante prepares for the impression made by Farinata rising from his burning coffin, and the role which the interruption by Cavalcante's father plays in heightening the imperturbable grandeur of the man who "holds hell in great scorn."²¹⁵ The Ugolino essay also comments, step by step, even line by line, on the narrative. It draws attention to linkages and anticipations in order to explain character. The man who furiously bites his own hands in the tower is the same man who will

gnaw the skull of his betrayer in hell.²¹⁶ De Sanctis builds up an impression of the gigantic and vague and, contrary to his usual stress on clarity and definiteness, admits and develops the ambiguities of the verse

Poscia, più che il dolor, potè il digiuno.²¹⁷

The criticism becomes evocating, even impressionistic, but it keeps its basis in a close reading of the text directed toward a psychological explanation. De Sanctis answers such questions as, What are the feelings of Ugolino toward his sons? toward Ruggiero? toward Dante? The offense of Ruggiero is not Ugolino's death but the death of his sons. Dante's outburst of hatred against Pisa corresponds to the inhuman, colossal proportions of Ruggiero's guilt. Here specific feelings and the motivations of the characters are the main concern of De Sanctis' criticism.

But this is obviously only one aspect of De Sanctis' practical criticism. De Sanctis' greatness is rather in his success of combining a historical vision and scheme with an intensely searching criticism of a poet's world. Within this scheme De Sanctis suggested the essentials of an aesthetics which developed and pointed up *motifs* of romantic criticism, (organicity, concrete form, the autonomy of art) so successfully that De Sanctis has been able to exert a powerful influence on Croce and his followers. But De Sanctis' position is not so much that of a forerunner: he is rather a synthesizer who fuses Hegelian history with romantic dialectic aesthetics and translates them both into a new context in which the metaphysics are dropped and the new positive and realist spirit has been assimilated. His historical position (though he of course differs widely in his theories and practice) is similar to that of Belinsky in Russia and Taine in France. All three, De Sanctis, Belinsky and Taine, absorbed Hegelian historicism and romantic aesthetics and transformed them for the needs of their time and place, preserving their essential truths and thus handing them on to the 20th century. But De Sanctis' achievement far transcends his historical role: in spite of lapses into didacticism and emotionalism, he wrote what seems in many ways the finest history of any literature ever written: it suc-

cessfully combines a broad historical scheme with close criticism, theory with practice, aesthetic generalization with particular analysis. While a historian, he is still a critic, a judge of art.

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NOTES

[The key to abbreviations is at the beginning of the Bibliography.]

- (1) Cf. e. g. *Saggi e scritti critici e vari*, 8 vols. La Universale Barion, Milano, 1936-8, with notes assuming total ignorance of history and literature.
- (2) *Estetica* (8th ed. Bari, 1946), p. 411.
- (3) *Studi di letterature moderne*, (Milano, 1915), p. 3.
- (4) See Bibliography under Contini, Gerratana, Muscetta, Sapegno.
- (5) Op. cit. 3, 390. Saintsbury could not have read the *History of Italian Literature* when he wrote: "They complain of the *History of Italian Literature* that, good as it is, it is too much of a bundle of Essays."
- (6) See Bibliography under Orsini and Gaspary.
- (7) *Essais critiques*, 8, 65.
- (8) See bibliography, also under Louis A. Breglio.
- (9) De Sanctis often addresses the poets he discusses, or his audience, and makes statements like "Il nostro Alfieri è un uomo che al solo nominarlo ci sentiamo superbi di essere italiani." (S. C. I, 153). Some lectures are printed with insertions about the reactions of the audience: vivi applausi, ilarità, benissimo, etc. See e. g. S. C. 3, 277 ff. "Zola e l'Assommoir."
- (10) Cf. Gio. 202-3, S. C. 3, 296, 298.
- (11) S. C. 2, 176.
- (12) S. C. I, 210.
- (13) S. C. 2, 4.
- (14) Sto. I, 63.
- (15) Lez. 339.
- (16) Manz. 38.
- (17) Manz. 36.
- (18) Scuola 424.
- (19) Manz. 36. Pet. 232.
- (20) Gio. 290; Sto. 2, 201; S. C. 3, 283.
- (21) S. C. I, 238, 266; Pet. 24-5.
- (22) S. C. 3, 268.
- (23) Pet. 91, S. C. 2, 268-9.
- (24) Manz. 59.
- (25) Gio. 279-81.
- (26) Sto. 2, 230.
- (27) S. C. 2, 93.
- (28) Sto. I, 67. "Paganizzare."
- (29) S. C. I, 88.
- (30) Gio. 314.
- (31) Lez. 354.
- (32) Lez. 350.
- (33) Sto. I, 166.
- (34) Lez. 353.
- (35) S. C. 2, 172.
- (36) Sto. I, 169.
- (37) Manz. 41. But De Sanctis recognizes here that it is not superfluous to study the intentions of an author; it is not yet criticism but a preparation for it. Willy nilly, something of the intentional world always penetrates into the book and underlies it, as a motive or an obstacle.
- (38) S. C. I, 306-7.
- (39) Pet. 7.
- (40) S. C. 2, 90.
- (41) S. C. I, 125.
- (42) Leop. 283-4; S. C. 2, 20; Sto. 2, 309; S. C. 2, 72.
- (43) S. C. 2, 69.
- (44) S. C. 2, 81.
- (45) Pet. 10.

- (46) Pet. 19-20.
- (47) This must be emphasized against recent attempts of Italian Marxists to make De Sanctis a materialist. Art with De Sanctis is not a mirror of the social development, inferior to reality, Art must not produce types as Marxist criticism demands. What is common to Marxism and De Sanctis is easily explained by the common ancestry in Hegelianism and a common interest in 19th century realism.
- (48) S. C. 3, 288.
- (49) Sto. 1, 184.
- (50) S. C. 2, 268-9n.
- (51) Sto. 1, 185. De Sanctis might have known Karl Rosenkranz's *Aesthetik des Hässlichen* (1853) or the extensive discussions in F. T. Vischer's *Aesthetik* (Reutlingen, 1846-57. e. g. 1, 336 ff.; 2, 14, 17, and 3, 1187-10.).
- (52) Pet. 20.
- (53) Sto. 1, 185. S. C. 2, 246. See odd reflections on Francesca da Rimini. "La poesia della donna è d'esser vinta . . . La donna depravata dalla passione è un essere contro natura, perciò straniero a noi e di nessuno interesse."
- (54) S. C. 2, 268 n.
- (55) Pet. 91.
- (56) S. C. 2, 268.
- (57) S. C. 2, 286.
- (58) Sto. 2, 392.
- (59) S. C. 3, 124.
- (60) Scuola, 6.
- (61) Pet. 49.
- (62) S. C. 2, 355.
- (63) S. C. 3, 216.
- (64) Sto. 1, 177.
- (65) S. C. 2, 89.
- (66) S. C. 1, 91.
- (67) Manz. 27.
- (68) Gio. 243.
- (69) Cf. S. C. 1, 137.
- (70) Pet. 101-2.
- (71) S. C. 1, 29.
- (72) S. C. 3, 106.
- (73) *Vorlesungen über Aesthetik*. ed. Glockner, 1, 245, 268 f., 271-2; on lyrical situation 3, 431.
- (74) Bibliography under Binni, Contini and Orsini.
- (75) S. C. 1, 257. Manz. 65 and passim.
- (76) S. C. 3, 268.
- (77) Manz., 66.
- (78) S. C. 1, 227.
- (79) S. C. 1, 202.
- (80) Sto. 1, 64-5. The distinction comes from Schelling, Jean Paul, and A. W. Schlegel. In Coleridge the terms are reversed.
- (81) Sto. 1, 69.
- (82) Sto. 1, 299.
- (83) S. C. 1, 33.
- (84) S. C. 1, 34.
- (85) Sto. 1, 416.
- (86) S. C. 1, 248.
- (87) Sto. 1, 205.
- (88) S. C. 2, 184.
- (89) S. C. 3, 44.
- (90) Manz. 15.
- (91) S. C. 2, 306.
- (92) S. C. 1, 23.
- (93) S. C. 3, 26.
- (94) S. C. 3, 285.
- (95) Pet. 88.
- (96) Cf. S. C. 2, 302. Pet. 93. Scuola 449-50. Sto. 2, 401.
- (97) Sto. 1, 344.
- (98) Manz. 85.
- (99) Sto. 2, 384.
- (100) Gio. 232.
- (101) Pet. 91.
- (102) Poesia, 94.

- (103) S. C. 3, 296.
 (104) S. C. 1, 240.
 (105) S. C. 2, 268 n.
 (106) S. C. 3, 117.
 (107) Sto. 2, 134.
 (108) Sto. 1, 332.
 (109) Sto. 2, 371.
 (110) Sto. 1, 441.
 (111) Pet. 23.
 (112) Sto. 1, 275.
 (113) Sto. 1, 64.
 (114) Sto. 1, 169.
 (115) Sto. 1, 175.
 (116) Sto. 1, 210.
 (117) Sto. 1, 212-3.
 (118) Sto. 1, 234.
 (119) Sto. 1, 254.
 (120) Sto. 1, 263.
 (121) Sto. 1, 267.
 (122) Sto. 1, 269.
 (123) Pet. 228.
 (124) Pet. 66.
 (125) Sto. 1, 279-80.
 (126) Sto. 1, 282.
 (127) Sto. 1, 329.
 (128) Sto. 1, 345.
 (129) Sto. 1, 327.
 (130) Sto. 1, 334-5.
 (131) Sto. 2, 79.
 (132) Sto. 1, 358.
 (133) Sto. 1, 357.
 (134) Sto. 2, 36.
 (135) Cf. S. C. 2, 174 ff.
 (136) Sto. 2, 30.
 (137) Sto. 2, 163.
 (138) Sto. 2, 179.
 (139) Sto. 2, 67, 75, 104. Cf. also the lecture on Machiavelli. S. C. 2, 309 ff.
 (140) S. C. 3, 1 ff.
 (141) Sto. 2, 233.
 (142) Sto. 2, 310.
 (143) Sto. 2, 191.
 (144) Sto. 2, 331-351. See also the somewhat different article on Metastasio (1871) reprinted in *Poesia*, 192-215 and for comment the bibliography under Croce (no. 12) and Fubini.
 (145) S. C. 3, 122.
 (146) Scuola, 183.
 (147) Sto. 2, 365.
 (148) Sto. 2, 374.
 (149) Sto. 2, 377-8.
 (150) S. C. 3, 112-39, esp. 138.
 (151) Sto. 2, 389.
 (152) See S. C. 1, 100-3, 144-62, 187-99.
 (153) S. C. 3, 102.
 (154) S. C. 3, 95.
 (155) Manz. 10.
 (156) Manz. 33.
 (157) Manz. 52-53.
 (158) Manz. 61, 65.
 (159) Sto. 2, 433-4.
 (160) S. C. 2, 115-60. For the curious story of Schopenhauer's misinterpretation of the essay as praise, see bibliography under Croce (no. 5).
 (161) S. C. 2, 159-60. The translation in the text is that of Geoffrey L. Bickersteth, in *The Poems of Giacomo Leopardi*, Cambridge, 1923, pp. 131-2.
 (162) Leop. 99.
 (163) Leop. 92.
 (164) See S. C. 1, 25-43 on Guerrazzi, 1, 44-70 on Padre Bresciani, 1, 71-99 on Prati, in 2, 189-215 again on Prati.
 (165) S. C. 3, 234-276, "Studio sopra E. Zola" (1878); 3, 277-299 on *l'Assommoir* (1879).
 (166) "L'Ideale" (1877) in *Poesia* 308-313; Pet 23-25. (A note, added in 1883), and "Il Darwinismo nell'arte" (1883), conclusion, S. C. 3, 325.
 (167) S. C. 3, 299.
 (168) Sto. 2, 437.
 (169) Sto. 1, 364.

- (170) Sto. 2, 166.
- (171) Sto. 2, 206.
- (172) Sto. 2, 283.
- (173) Manz. 4.
- (174) Sto. 2, 164.
- (175) Sto. 2, 338.
- (176) Sto. 2, 349.
- (177) S. C. 1, 189.
- (178) Sto. 2, 15.
- (179) S. C. 1, 190, 197-8.
- (180) For further comment on concept of Renaissance and music see bibliography under Cantemori, Parente and Toffanin.
- (181) Sto. 2, 191, 194-5.
- (182) See bibliography under Binni.
- (183) S. C. 2, 278-9.
- (184) See the list in back of Croce's ed. of Sto. 2, 453-57.
- (185) S. C. 2, 279.
- (186) Pet. 8.
- (187) S. C. 2, 280.
- (188) Gio. 323.
- (189) Poesia, 3.
- (190) Letter to Camillo de Meis, 1869.
- (191) S. C. 3, 45-6. Cf. S. C. 2, 256, 307 and Sto. 1, 210 quoted in note 116.
- (192) Sto. 1, 230.
- (193) Sto. 2, 164.
- (194) For fuller discussion see bibliography under Neri and Petronio.
- (195) On history of translation see B. Croce in *La Critica* 10 (1912), 146-7.
- (196) Lez. 340.
- (197) Lez. 341-2.
- (198) On Vischer and De Sanctis, see Croce No. 9; Pet. 236. "Niente mi pareva più inestetico che l'*Estetica* di Vischer." De Sanctis probably refers to its clumsy form, divisions, paragraphs, rather than to its doctrine.

- (199) Gio. 321.
- (200) Manz. 19; S. C. 2, 237; S. C. 2, 6 n. Scuola, 14; Ib. 416.
- (201) S. C. 2, 10 ff.
- (202) Gio. 327. Cf. S. C. 1, 194, 230.
- (203) Teoria 2, 73 and Leop. 282.
- (204) S. C. 1, 107-8, 110.
- (205) S. C. 1, 130; S. C. 2, 6n, 73.
- (206) S. C. 1, 110 and 253-67.
- (207) S. C. 1, 134. Cf. S. C. 1, 141, 262 and 2, 3. Also Gio. 256.
- (208) S. C. 1, 139-40. S. C. 1, 175.
- (209) S. C. 3, 172.
- (210) Leop. 286. Cf. Ib. 15, and S. C. 2, 342.
- (211) Pet. 9.
- (212) S. C. 2, 12.
- (213) S. C. 2, 50-51.
- (214) S. C. 2, 246-7, 252-3, 255.
- (215) S. C. 2, 294.
- (216) S. C. 3, 38.
- (217) *Inferno* 33, 75. Note that Croce (see no. 14 in bibliography) strongly disapproves of De Sanctis' admission of ambiguity.
- (218) S. C. 3, 43-4.

Belfagor

or

The Devil Takes A Wife

by

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI

[It is hardly to be counted ignorance not to know that Niccolò Machiavelli, brilliant and stern author of the *Prince*, the *Discourses on Livy* and the *History of Florence*, also wrote a wry and witty fable of the devil who took a wife. Indeed, in the past its authenticity has been questioned, and it has been attributed to others. It would seem on the face of it, perhaps, to be out of keeping with the seriousness and severity of his major works. Yet he also wrote the best Italian comedy before Goldoni, *La Mandragola* (which, by the way, is in desperate need of a fresh and accurate English translation.) Nowadays not many would doubt that *Belfagor* is the work of Machiavelli. There is in all his works a latent satiric tone that whets his sharp awareness.

Whether by migration or polygenesis (who could say?), the story of the devil who took a wife is remarkably widespread in the folklore of Europe. Aside from primitive oral tradition, the earliest literary instance of any importance is Machiavelli's version. It was soon widely translated, and is directly or indirectly related to at least four English plays (including Ben Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass*), as well as one of the *Contes* of La Fontaine. It continued to have currency in the nineteenth century, when two operas were written on the subject; but more important, Ottorino Respighi in the twentieth century took it as the plot of his comic opera *Belfagor*.

The shortness and concision of the story give it at first glance the appearance of a simple anecdote. And yet certain overtones and stylistic devices create an impression of unexpected depth. One may note, for instance, the droll attempt to convince the reader of its "historical" veracity by casting the narrative as the vision of a *very* holy man. Also, in the pompous, legalistic and

self-righteous Pluto, one can glimpse a satiric view of earthly monarchs, who by implication are devils in their own right.

(The name Belfagor is roughly the Septuagint version of Baal-Peor.)]

In ancient accounts of Florentine history one may read of a certain very holy man (known already by word of mouth), whose manner of life was praised by everyone living at that time. We read how, engrossed in his prayers, he had by their efficacy a vision of the innumerable souls of those wretched mortals who died without God's grace and went to Hell, all or most of whom reproached themselves for no other reason than for having been brought to such misery by taking a wife.

It was this that amazed Minos and Rhadamanthus, and the other judges of Hell. They could not bring themselves to believe these slanders on womankind which were uttered as the truth; yet day after day the accusations increased. When they had presented Pluto with a full and proper account he decided to hold a judicious inquiry in consultation with all the princes of Hell. Then he would take the advice he judged best, either to expose the imposture or to find out the whole truth of the matter. Accordingly, when the council convened, Pluto spoke to this effect:

"Dearly beloved in Hell: though I possess this realm by heavenly ordinance and by fateful and irrevocable fortune (and for this reason I cannot be subjected to any tribunal either in Heaven or on Earth), nonetheless, because those who are most powerful show the greatest prudence in submitting most to the laws and in regarding most highly the judgment of others, I have decided to be advised by you as to how, in a matter that could result in disgrace for our Empire, I should conduct myself. Wherefore, given that every one of the souls of men who come to our realm declares the cause to have been his wife and granted that this seems to us quite impossible, we fear that in rendering a verdict on the testimony we may be censured for being too credulous or, in not doing so, for lacking rigor and love of justice. Observing that the one is a fault of the frivolous and the other a fault of the unjust, and wishing to

escape the accusation that might proceed from one or the other, and unable ourself to find a solution, we have convoked you to the end that you may assist us with your advice and be the reason that this realm continue, as it has in the past, to remain above reproach."

All the princes thought the matter exceedingly important and momentous; and, while they all concluded it was necessary to uncover the truth, they could not agree on how to go about it. For some thought that just one of them, and some that several, should be sent to Earth, and in human shape should find out the truth in person. It struck many of the others that it could be done without such inconvenience by inducing certain souls by certain tortures to reveal it. But when the majority advised that just one of them be sent, they all came round to that view. Since no one could be found to volunteer for the undertaking, they decided to resort to lots. The loser was Belfagor the arch-devil (but formerly archangel, before he fell from Heaven). Though he felt reluctant to accept the assignment, nevertheless, under constraint of Pluto's power, he agreed to follow the decisions of the council and he bound himself to those stipulations which they had solemnly set: to wit, that the one appointed to the task should be granted forthwith 100,000 ducats, with which he was to depart for Earth and, in human form, take a wife and live with her for ten years; then, pretending to die, he was to return and from his own experience give a true account to his superiors of the burdens and trials of marriage. Furthermore, it was decreed that during the stated time he should be subject to all those human discomforts and ills which result from poverty, imprisonment, disease and all the other calamities that befall man, unless by deceit or cunning he were able to escape them. Thereupon Belfagor took the instructions and the money and went off to Earth.

Having ordered his bands of devils to provide him with horses and attendants, he entered Florence with a great show of respectability. He chose that city above all others for his residence because it seemed to him the most likely to maintain a person who could handle his money with all the arts of usury. Under the name Roderick of Castile,

he rented a house in the quarter of Ognissanti. And to keep people from finding out his circumstances, he told them he had recently left Spain and gone to Syria, and at Aleppo had earned all his fortune. From there he had then departed for Italy to take a wife in surroundings more civilized and more in keeping with polite society and his own tastes. Roderick was very handsome and appeared to be about thirty years old. In a few days he had shown that he abounded in wealth; and, as he made a show of benevolence and generosity, many noble citizens who had numerous daughters, and little money, offered them to him. From amongst them all, Roderick chose a very beautiful girl by the name of Honesta, daughter of Amerigo Donati. The father had three other daughters, as well as three grown sons, and the daughters were almost at the age of marriage. Though he was of a most noble family and highly regarded in Florence, still, considering the household he maintained and his nobility, he was impoverished.

Roderick had himself a magnificent and resplendent wedding; nothing desirable on such festive occasions was omitted. Being subject to all human passions, according to the orders given him when he left Hell, he began at once to take delight in the honors and ceremonies of Earth and to set great store on being praised among men; all of which cost him no little expense. Besides, he had not lived long with his lady Honesta before he fell excessively in love with her. He could not endure to see her sad or vexed. Along with her nobility and beauty, Lady Honesta had brought with her into Roderick's house such great pride as Lucifer never had; and Roderick, who had experienced both, pronounced his wife's to be the greater. And it became greater by far once she realized the extent of her husband's love. When she found she could lord it over her husband in all things, she began ordering him about mercilessly and disrespectfully; nor did she hesitate, when he refused her anything, to backbite with low and abusive words. All this for Roderick was the cause of infinite distress. Yet his father-in-law, her brothers, her relations, the marriage bond, and above all his love for her made him have patience.

It would be useless to recount the great expense to which he was put in satisfying her desire to dress in the latest fashion and to follow the fads which our city, according to its confirmed habit, changes continually. In his desire to remain at peace with her, he was forced to help his father-in-law marry off the other daughters, on which he spent a great sum of money. Then, wishing to stay on good terms with her, he had to send one of the brothers to the East with cloth goods, another to the West with silks, and for the third to set up a goldsmithy in Florence. For these enterprises he gave out the greater part of his fortune.

Besides, at Carnival time and on St. John's Day, when the whole city was celebrating according to its ancient custom, and when many of the rich and noble citizens honored each other with elaborate banquets, Lady Honesta, unwilling to be outdone by the other women, desired her Roderick to hold such festivities as would surpass all the others. These things he tolerated for the same reasons; nor would they have seemed burdensome (though in reality they were very much so), if domestic tranquility had sprung from them and if he had been allowed to await the day of his ruin in peace. But just the opposite occurred. For along with the intolerable expenses, her insolent manner brought him endless distress. There was not a servant or a waiter in his house who could abide her, not for a matter of months but of days. It caused Roderick serious inconvenience in not permitting him to keep a trusted servant who would have regard for his affairs. Not to mention others, there were those devils he had brought with him as attendants, who chose to go back to the fires of Hell rather than live on Earth under the command of that woman.

So, in the midst of such turmoil and agitation, having consumed in excessive spending all his ready money, Roderick began to live on the hope of revenues he expected from both East and West. His credit still good, he issued bills of exchange to keep up his establishment; and since he already had signed and circulated promissory notes, this was soon noticed by those in the same financial plight. While his affairs were already that delicate, news came from both East and West at the same time, to the effect that one

of Lady Honesta's brothers had gambled away all of Roderick's funds, and that the other, returning on a ship loaded with his merchandise, wholly uninsured, went to the bottom with it. No sooner was the news out than Roderick's creditors banded together and judged him to be ruined. Unable to reveal their suspicions, since his payments were not yet due, they decided that he should be closely watched, with such vigilance that from one moment to the next he would be unable to escape in secret. As for Roderick, seeing no solution to his trouble and knowing full well his obligations under the edict of Hell, he intended to escape at all costs.

One morning he mounted a horse, and left by way of the Prato gate, near where he lived. No sooner was his departure observed than his creditors raised a hue and cry, and having appealed to the magistrates not only through legal agents but through popular protest, they gave him chase. Roderick had barely gone a mile from the city before he heard the hubbub behind him. Finding himself in such straits, he decided, in order to escape in secret, to turn off the road and try his luck across the fields. But he was hindered from doing so by the great number of ditches that crisscross the countryside; and for that reason, unable to go on horseback, he set out to escape on foot. He left his mount on the road, and crossing field after field covered with vines and canes (which are abundant there), in the neighborhood of Peretola he reached the house of Gianmatteo del Brica, a laborer of Giovanni del Bene; and by chance he came upon Gianmatteo himself, who was carrying home fodder for his oxen. He commended himself to him, promising that if he saved him from the hands of his enemies, who were pursuing him in order to have him die in prison, he would make him rich and give him such proofs before leaving that he would believe him, and if he failed to do so, he was content that Gianmatteo should be the one to turn him over to his enemies. Though a peasant, Gianmatteo was a man of courage, and surmising that he could not lose in trying to save the man, promised to do so. He shoved him onto a dunghill in front of the house and covered

him over with stalks and other rubbish he had gathered to burn.

Roderick was barely hidden when his pursuers drew up to a halt. In spite of their intimidations, they failed to extract from Gianmatteo whether he had seen him or not; so they went on, and after searching in vain that day and the next, they returned wearily to Florence. When the noise had faded away, Gianmatteo brought Roderick out from his hiding place and asked for the pledge he had given. "Dear Brother," Roderick replied, "I'm very much obliged to you and I want to give you full satisfaction. So that you'll believe I'm capable of it, I'll tell you who I am." Then he told about himself and about the orders he brought with him from Hell and about the wife he had taken. Also, he told Gianmatteo just how he would make him rich; in short, thus: when he heard that a certain woman was possessed by a devil, he would know it to be Roderick who was inside her; and he would not depart from her unless Gianmatteo came to exorcise him. In this way Gianmatteo would be able to ask payment of her family however he pleased. When they had reached an agreement, Roderick vanished.

Not many days went by before the news spread around Florence that a daughter of Messer Ambruogio Amidei, the wife of Bonaiuto Tebalducci, was possessed by a devil. Her family did not fail to try all the usual cures: they placed on her head the head of Saint Zenobius and the cloak of Saint John Walbert—at which Roderick only scoffed. To convince everyone that the girl's trouble was a devil and not some extravagant caprice, he spoke in Latin and debated philosophical questions and revealed the sins of many people, among which those of a friar who kept a woman dressed as a seminarist in his cell for more than four years. These things amazed everybody.

On account of this, Messer Ambruogio lived in misery. Having tried all remedies, he had lost every hope of curing her, when Gianmatteo came to see him and promised to restore the girl's health if he were given 500 florins to buy a farm at Peretola. Messer Ambruogio accepted the offer; whereupon, Gianmatteo first had some masses said and ceremonies performed to trick things out, and then ap-

proached the girl and whispered in her ear: "Roderick, I come here to make you keep your promise." To which Roderick replied: "Very well. But this is not enough to make you rich; and so, when I've left this girl I'll enter into the daughter of King Charles of Naples, and will not be gone without you. He'll then grant you any reward you like. After that you'll give me no more trouble." Having said this, he abandoned the girl, to the delight and amazement of all Florence.

Not long afterward, throughout Italy spread the news of the misfortune of the daughter of King Charles of Naples. No cure was found, and the King, hearing of Gianmatteo, sent to Florence for him. He went to Naples, and after a fake ceremony or two, cured her. But Roderick, before he departed, said: "You see, Gianmatteo, I've kept my promise to make you rich. And now being quits, I'm no longer bound in any way. For that reason you'll be lucky not to meet up with me again; because, just as I've done you a good turn in the past, I'll do you a bad one in the future."

At that, Gianmatteo returned to Florence a very rich man (the King had given him more than 50,000 ducats) and intended to enjoy his wealth in peace, unable to believe that Roderick might think of doing him harm. But his thoughts were soon upset by news he received that the daughter of Louis VII, king of France, was possessed by a devil. It was unsettling to Gianmatteo's peace of mind when he thought of that King's authority and those words Roderick had spoken to him.

Having failed to find a cure for his daughter, and hearing of Gianmatteo's skill, the King sent for him, at first simply by courier. But when Gianmatteo expressed a certain disinclination, the King was compelled to turn to the city fathers, who forced him to obey the summons. When he arrived, dejected, in Paris, Gianmatteo first made it clear to the King that though he had in the past cured women possessed by a devil, it didn't mean he knew how to cure them all; for some devils were so depraved that they feared neither threats nor incantations nor religion. Still, he said he was ready to do what must be done and if he didn't succeed he asked pardon and forgiveness. In reply the King

said angrily that if he didn't cure her he'd be hanged. This depressed Gianmatteo's spirits considerably. Still, making the best of it, he had the bedeviled girl come forward; and drawing close to her ear, he humbly commended himself to Roderick, putting him in mind of the good turn done him and of the example of gross ingratitude he would set if he abandoned him in his great need. To that Roderick replied: "Ah, base traitor, so you're rash enough to come into my presence! Do you think you'll be able to boast of having got rich at my hands? I want to show you and everyone else that I can give and take at will." At that, Gianmatteo, seeing no way out for the time being, decided to try his luck some other way. When he had dismissed the bedeviled girl, he said to the King: "Sire, as I told you, there are many devils so wicked that nothing can be done with them; and this is one of those. For that reason, I want to make a last trial, and if it succeeds, both of us will have got our wish; if it doesn't, I'll be in your hands and you will take pity on me because of my innocence. For my purposes I'll have a stage erected in Our Lady Square, large enough to hold all your lords and all the clergy of this city. I'll have the stage draped in cloth of silk and gold. In the middle of it I'll set up an altar. Next Sunday morning I would like you, together with the clergy and all your princes and nobles, to convene there with royal pomp, clad in rich and resplendent costumes. After solemn mass is celebrated, I'll have the bedeviled princess brought forward. Besides all of this, in one corner of the Square I would like there to be at least twenty men with trumpets, horns, drums, bagpipes, tambourines, cymbals, and every other kind of noisemaker. When I raise my hat, let them take to their instruments and come toward the stage playing. This, together with certain other secret remedies, will, I think, exorcise this devil."

The King ordered everything to be done at once. When Sunday morning arrived and the stage was full of officials and the Square full of people, after mass had been celebrated the possessed girl was led to the stage by two bishops and many nobles. When Roderick saw so many people gathered together and such magnificence, he was almost taken aback, and said to himself: "What has this base coward

thought up? Does he think he can frighten me with this show? Doesn't he know that I'm used to seeing the pomps of Heaven and the furies of Hell? I'll not fail to punish him." When Gianmatteo came up to him and begged him to depart, he said: "Oh, it's a fine thing you've thought up! What do you think you can do with this showy display? Do you think you can escape my power and the King's anger this way? You base scoundrel, I'll have you hanged anyway."

So, what with the one pleading and the other cursing, it seemed to Gianmatteo that he ought not to lose any more time. He signaled with his hat, and the men appointed to make noise took to their instruments, and sounding to high heaven, came toward the stage. At that noise Roderick pricked up his ears. Not knowing what it could be and utterly bewildered, he felt stunned and asked Gianmatteo what was happening. Gianmatteo answered in tones of distress: "Alas, dear Roderick! It's your wife who has come to find you." It was astonishing to witness the sudden change that came over Roderick when he heard his wife's name. He was so overwhelmed that, not pausing to think whether it was possible or reasonable that she should appear, he fled in great fright without answering, leaving the girl free.

At once he set about returning to Hell to give account of his actions, rather than bowing once again to the marriage yoke with all its vexations, its indignities, its perils. And so, Belfagor went back to Hell and gave account of the ills his wife had brought into his house. And Gianmatteo, who knew more about it than the devil, went happily home.

Translated by Lowry Nelson, Jr.

The Italian Literary Language And Its (Un)Popularity

by

GIACOMO DEVOTO

[Last year, during his visit to this country, Professor Devoto showed great interest in the founding of an American Italian review, and offered to contribute what has become the following essay (whose Italian counterpart may be found in the *Nuova Antologia*). Students of the history of the Italian language know well his several authoritative works on that subject (some of which are cited in the notes to this essay). He has also written a book, *Studi di Stilistica* (Florence, 1950), of modest size, but which continues to arouse interest because of its rare combination of theoretical subtlety and gifted concrete analysis; indeed, it should soon appear in English. Professor Devoto, who teaches Linguistics and Philology at the University of Florence, is then in the most fruitful tradition of linguistics: that which combines a thorough technical skill with a full literary awareness.

The present essay is part of an age-old discussion that has gone on at least since the thirteenth century: the *questione della lingua*. One of the permanent achievements of the Renaissance in Italy was the successful defence of the literary dignity of the vernacular. At the same time, especially in Italy, the question at once arose: which vernacular? Since it is quite clear that it was the Tuscan vernacular that became the literary language accepted by everyone, whether Sicilian or Venetian, one may well ask what question remains. Yet since language is never static, we have always with us the question of what relation the "standard" literary language has with the still vigorous local dialects and with the local pronunciations and vocabularies: the old "dialogue" continues in muted form, the old dialectal dialectic.

Much more acutely than is felt in English-speaking countries, there remains in Italy the problem of preserving the literary language as a medium of national communication among the educated. At the same time, it cannot remain impervious to change by dialectal influence or general innovation. It is, then, the relationship between the literary language and the other forms of speech in Italy that concerns Professor Devoto. No one wants the literary language to become a sort of Mandarin and no one wants the local dialects to prevail and overwhelm any national means of communication. What, in theory, should be allowed and what rejected?

Two words used in the present essay, together with their derivatives, must be handled with care: "popularity" and "unpopularity." They refer, of course, not to the Gallup Poll, but rather to the degree to which the general population accepts a standard literary language and also the degree to which a local population departs from the standard. At stake is the question: how is the standard language to maintain its standards and still respond to the necessary and inevitable linguistic change?]

Toward the end of the eighteenth century Vittorio Alfieri made his linguistic confession of faith in a famous sonnet dedicated to the Tuscans:

*Uom, che barbaro quasi, in su la sponda
del non etrusco Tanaro nascea,
dove d'itale voci è impura l'onda,
sì ch'ella macchia ogni più tersa idea;
più lustri or son, ch'ei la natal sua immonda
favella in piena oblivion ponea;
e al vago dir, che l'alma Flora inonda,
e labbro e penna ed animo volgea.
Se niun di voi, cigni dell'Arno, or vede
spurio vestigio nel costui sermone,
cittadinanza di parole ei chiede.
Sacro tributo a Grecia tutta impone
l'unica Atene, di ogni grazia sede,
cui la Beozia stolta invan si oppone.

*A man who was a semi-barbarian from having been born on the non-Etruscan Tanaro, where the waves lack the purity of Italian speech, so that the clearest idea becomes tainted, many years ago set aside and forgot his native impure tongue, and to the fair speech, which from foster Florence issues, turned his lips and pen and heart. If none of you, O swans of Arno, now detects a spurious strain in this man's speech, he then asks of you the citizenship of words. The one and only Athens, home of every grace, whom foolish Boeotia opposes in vain, demands tribute of all Greece.

Implied in this sonnet is an old source of torment, a drama through which Alfieri himself lived in the process of breaking out of the linguistic confines of his native Piedmontese. Yet it is based on what is now for him a certainty. The literary language is *one*. It has a standard in Florentine. It has well-defined boundaries without shaded areas. It is available to anyone who, though born far from Florence, draws inspiration from its norms and makes himself worthy of it.

The sonnet to the Tuscans was, for Alfieri, a point of arrival.

It was a long process that led to unification of the literary language, and it had not been an experience exclusively of Italians. Indeed, to estimate the Italian achievement, one must take note of the forces that had led to linguistic unity in other countries, in France, England and Germany. In France and England linguistic unity was, from the Middle Ages on, the work of the monarchy and its administration. In Germany, after attempts were made to establish a bureaucratic or diplomatic language, unification was brought about by the Protestant Reformation, with the translation of the Bible into a common tongue and with the dissemination of sermons and polemics in a language everyone accepted.

For Italy political unity was long a mere dream, and so it was in Alfieri's day. Religion, until the nineteenth century, was essentially bilingual: dependent on Latin in its ceremonies and on the dialects in its preaching. Linguistic unification, then, was due to the literary prestige of the Tuscan tradition, and to it alone.

And since this prestige was established from the sixteenth century on, Italy is in the doubly fortunate position of having a literary language based on exclusively intellectual traditions and, moreover, stabilized with an advantage of at least two centuries over the other tongues in question. Italians read Dante with less effort than is necessary for a German to read Hans Sachs or for a Frenchman to read Rabelais. This can be said with a certain proud satisfaction.

One must, however, look even beyond these traits, basic as they are, of stability and intellectuality. Though there

are bright spots in the history of literary Italian, there is no dearth of shadows, uncertainties, and problems. And one of these is the question of its "popularity" or "unpopularity;" that is, its relation to colloquial speech and its general acceptance.

A knowledge, no more than modest, of the languages involved gives the impression that writing, even of a non-literary nature (e.g., scientific or journalistic), has in French and English writers an air of spontaneity and naturalness; whereas in German and Italian writers it seems artificial or careless. This impression is confirmed at a glance if we compare the *Proemio* of G. I. Ascoli¹ (which in fact deals with the Italian literary language) to the discussion of the literary languages of Greece by Antoine Meillet,² or compare the introduction to the *Ethics* of Wilhelm Wundt³ to the preface to Herbert Spencer's *Ethics*.⁴ Short of a thorough inquiry, we may be led to believe that, where political history and governmental institutions have had a decisive influence on linguistic unification, it has been exerted on the literary language from within, that it has found collaboration and response on wider levels of the linguistic community, that it has created simultaneously both readers and writers. In Italy and in Germany, where linguistic unity was brought about by elites, readers indeed sprang up all over the country. But writers were left in higher and stricter linguistic confines, even when they adopted popularizing attitudes; in fact, in Italy as well as Germany, national culture seemed distrustful toward "belles lettres."⁵ The literary language was like a right which everyone accepted passively, while actively it was the concern or monopoly of an aristocracy, be it only the aristocracy of the pen.

The question posed is no longer, in a strict sense, literary (that is, esthetic), but social: In a national community, whom does the literary language serve?

The so-called masses, no matter how close or how distant they are at any one time in relation to the written language, do not have merely a passive role to play, and, especially, do not play the same role at all times. And in fact, linguistic institutions,⁶ like legal and economic ones, exert

their slightly different though analogous effects on the totality of elements in a national community. Laws, of course, affect all citizens, just as economic conventions do. But in a society composed of classes more or less distinct, there are not only linguistic, but also legal and economic differences: legal subtleties confined to groups of experts, economic speculations for the privileged, linguistic accomplishments exclusive to an aristocracy of the spirit. But even in the presence of fundamental differences, these aspects always remain intercommunicating.

A useful image is to compare society to a building. It may be divided horizontally into floors: each floor represents a class which has nothing in common with the tenants of the other classes, except proximity and the unavoidable contacts of joint tenancy. There is no real intercourse between classes, no possibility of their experiencing together the advantages or the discomforts of, say, the best view or the inadequate stairs.

But we can imagine a vertical division of the building which allows everyone to enjoy the practical advantages of the street floor and the view and better air of the upper stories: a building in which everyone is concerned with the sturdiness and serviceability of the roof.

There are times and societies in which the stability of classes makes horizontally divided buildings preferable, there are times and societies in which the mobility of classes makes preferable vertical division. And we are still speaking of buildings not more perfect but more adequate to the times, when we say that, as in the first case, they lend themselves to the first kind of division, to strongly differentiated classes, or, as in the second case, that they are more apt to favor the rise of men and the mutual influence of institutions.

Buildings and structures reflect a tradition that must constantly adapt itself to new demands. But new demands cannot make radical and continuous changes in buildings and structures. The unceasing dialogue, or dialectical relationship, between tenants and buildings is, in this comparison, the unceasing dialogue which is the substance of the history of institutions, legal, economic, and linguistic. In

economics or in law or in linguistics there exists no absolute freedom or restraint, no absolute mobility or stasis; instead, the two factors are always present in varying proportions.

We have a ready example in what happened during the last centuries of the Roman Empire. The society of the time had created a sort of social democracy or an easy mobility of social classes. Traditional legal and economic institutions gave rise to frequent crises. From the time of Marcus Aurelius, it was only the personality of some emperors that gained ascendancy in the absence of any law of succession. Not even the validity of coinage remained stable, giving rise to conflicting solutions in the fourth and fifth centuries.⁷ The literary language, on the other hand, had turned to contemplating the ancient models, had assimilated the revolutionary ideas of Christian doctrine without suffering aftereffects, and from time to time rekindled its enthusiasm for Ciceronian models.

It is difficult to speak of the conscious meanings of words and constructions of the time. New words like *portare* for *ferre*, *vadere* for *ire*, and *plorare* for *flere*⁸ rise to the level of the literary language, neither invited nor led there by convenient steps, but because they found their way, so to speak, instinctively. No debate took place like the one in the first Empire which had opposed Asianism to Atticism. Tertullian is more modern and liberal, in the tradition of the literary language, than St. Augustine.⁹ The upshot is that the Empire did not end so decisively from the point of view of legal and economic institutions as it did from the point of view of linguistic ones. The barbarian kingdoms that follow one upon the other, with all their drawbacks, preserved some partial unity.

Literary Latin, the anachronistic preserve of a minority, was continued in the episcopal schools and the monasteries. Aside from its literary form, Latin broke up into as many lesser units as there were parishes and market places. Italy, divided as it was between so many absurdly provincial local Latins on the one hand, and, on the other, a literary Latin anachronistically unified and elevated, became quickly bi-

lingual.¹⁰ The local dialects developed rapidly, while literary Latin became more and more rigid and sterile.

This is not to say that all forms of linguistic development are to be feared. Byzantine immobility has preserved for us a linguistic tradition substantially faithful to the classical Greek tradition, though notably altered in pronunciation. The advantages of the cultural continuity which this permitted do not compensate for the disadvantages of the intellectual and social immobility which it reflects.

It is a question of demanding from linguistic institutions just that degree of stability and also mobility that would correspond, not to ideal abstract norms, but to the requirements and tendencies and active relationships among classes of any given age. In this the literary language of the late Empire was inadequate.

If the situation in the sixth century is compared with that in the age of Alfieri, the passage from chaos to order could hardly seem more decisive; indeed, it was miraculous. The stages it went through were numerous. Even in Barbarian times, some sort of new linguistic fabric reasserted itself even on the regional and inter-regional levels. The Langobard Kingdom reinstituted certain linguistic interchanges, at least in its more southerly duchies. The Frankish age witnessed the constant arrival in Rome of pilgrims from northern Italy and France. In the age of the communes, which marked the high point of local autonomy and political atomization, certain elements of linguistic reconstruction of a popular nature were happily becoming noticeable. What we have is a "constructive popularity," not as yet "literariness."

Somewhat later the Swabian court at Palermo sheltered and encouraged poets of various origin who wrote in their vernacular. The university center of Bologna instigated grammatical studies, first of Latin and then of the vernacular. The artisans of Florence, even before they had poets as fellow citizens, became interested in vernacular poetry, and commissioned copyists. A favorable atmosphere was created in which Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio could leave their echo and their imprint.

This imprint was an affirmation of Florentine prestige and also the fusion and synthesis of separate traditions. The literary language thus born was not absolutely unreceptive to words and constructions from elsewhere, whether Sicilian or Lombard. It led neither to chaos nor to immobility.

Signs of resistance in Sicily, Naples and Lombardy only confirm the spontaneity of the movement toward unification. Even non-Tuscan writers like Sannazaro and Ariosto in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries conformed to it.

Nor was there any question of pervasive artificiality or real unpopularity, even though certain lexical and syntactic Latinisms made their way into the linguistic system. No one, not even Dante, insisted on following a theory.

With the sixteenth century a change took place. In the first part of the century linguistic unity had become an accepted fact, and the question arose as to its nature. There was above all the problem of defending literary Italian against the theoretical prestige of Latin,¹¹ and next the problem of defining it as a tradition to be followed, not capriciously, as in the past, but consistently.

Thus, Pietro Bembo allied himself to Tuscany in place and to the fourteenth century in time. Likewise, Baldassare Castiglione insisted on the contemporary norms to be found on the higher levels of society, at the courts, even at the non-Tuscan courts of Urbino, Ferrara and Mantua.

From the victory of Tuscan speech (though in a less extreme form than Bembo had proposed) ensued the linguistic security that became widespread in the second half of the sixteenth century and reached one of its high points in Galileo. It was succeeded by that irrepressible tendency toward ornamental and melodic expansion which in linguistic history is the parallel of Baroque.

This security was followed by an understandable fatigue, a trend toward the false naturalness of Arcadia (later seventeenth century), and then by the thoughtless attitude of those who introduced, together with ideas, theories and tastes, even words and expressions from France. By the middle of the eighteenth century the literary language was furrowed by a kind of bilingualism: a guarded and measured

poetic language on the one hand, and on the other, a tolerant prose language open to new words and constructions.

In those decades, however, a new concept, a new ideal emerged. "Italy" ceased to be simply a geographical notion and became a cohesive symbol of all that its inhabitants had in common: the language had pride of place. Alfieri's sonnet, in showing such linguistic security, did not reflect historical reality; yet it is symbolic of its time if, instead, it is related to the strong, especially the anti-French, patriotism which animated its author.

The victory and the security which Alfieri exalted in his sonnet were, in fact, neither complete nor definitive. They were not complete since, in direct opposition to Alfieri's sonnet, one may cite the words of Pietro Verri,¹² reaffirming linguistic freedom and autonomy, if not exactly popularity: "in our opinion every word understood by all Italians is an Italian word; the authority and agreement of all Italians, when their language is involved, is superior to the authority of all the grammarians." And further: "when ever a writer says things that are reasonable and interesting and says them in a language understood by all Italians and writes them artistically enough that they can be read without tedium, he is to be considered a good Italian writer."

Nor were the victory and security definitive, since, even in the nineteenth century, the difference in points of view remained. On Alfieri's side, though far removed from him in temperament, we find an author, Alessandro Manzoni. On Verri's side, though operating from different assumptions, we encounter the greatest Italian linguist of the time, Graziadio Ascoli. No one would venture to say that the "liberal" theories of Ascoli created an Ascolian prose notable for its popularity.

Certainly, at this stage, the controversy was not without certain misunderstandings. Manzoni alone looked to an existing model worthy of imitation. Ascoli, as an historical linguist, was concerned with the formation and evolution of language, not with its solidification: he rejected all authoritarian, artificial, or conscious procedures.

And the misunderstanding continued into the twentieth century. Rather than active construction which would aim at

imitation, what prevailed was a defensive preoccupation, a fear of foreign elements, a geographical, no longer an historical, purism. This had its symbol in the *Idioma gentile* of Edmondo De Amicis (1905).

In the face of this, linguists did not give open battle; instead they withdrew into a silent and disdainful indifference. On the other hand, men of letters and scholars, such as Benedetto Croce and Cesare De Lollis, took up positions. They made an illustrious victim, the Accademia della Crusca, which from 1923 on was obliged to direct its activities to other ends than being custodian of the tradition of the Italian literary language.

Literary Italian did not become more popular as a result. With little difficulty it had been able to preserve its basic unpopularity up to the nineteenth century, since, whatever the prevailing theory might be, it was of concern to a minority, the "tenants of the top floor," the pure literati. For just as the middle and working classes, without parliaments, unions or parties, did not participate in economic and political life, so neither did they participate in linguistic life, except in its non-literary aspects: the technical language of scientists, the practical one of the professions, the popular speech of the workers. Society was rigidly stratified into classes.

From the moment the first World War uprooted the majority of Italians from their place of origin, to make them live under regimental discipline and in daily contact with death, it furnished all the soldiers if not the means, the opportunity, if not the opportunity, the desire to raise themselves to a national plane: from the standpoint both of legal and social aspirations and of linguistic institutions. And when the spread of trade unions, national corporations and civil registration placed everyone in daily contact with public offices and organizations, which had nothing particularly local about them, there was formed the myth of a technical language, alongside the literary language, on the national level, capable of expressing, not local desires and situations, but rather technical problems and achievements.

The discussions which Manzoni and Ascoli could keep alive almost a hundred years ago, however different from

those of the eighteenth or sixteenth century, have their same flavor, their same atmosphere of drawing-room discussions appropriate to the exclusive tenants of the "upper story." To try to continue or renew them today, whether in the name of conservatism or liberalism, would be anachronistic: on an elegant but narrow staircase there is no room for a crowd.

Therefore, the problem of the literary language of today presents two difficulties: a tradition that has been basically unpopular for four centuries and a new need for popularity which has become urgent and pressing.

A further difficulty was joined to these in the decline of language instruction in secondary schools which followed the Gentile reform (1923). Not even this made the literary language and its problems more popular. Despite the foundation of the journal *Lingua Nostra* (1939) and its prestige, and despite the articles on language to be found now in many magazines and newspapers, the problem of the literary language has been little felt, and that at a time when it has become intrinsically more complex.

The members of the Italian linguistic community concerned in this permanent interchange between social levels are too numerous to be regimented. In matters of pronunciation, the maintenance of correct spelling has become harder (and *not* easier) with the decline of illiteracy. The vocabulary is not defending itself against the onslaught of images, slogans and technical expressions that are breaking into it, particularly from the Anglo-Saxon world. The best that can be hoped for is that the literary language will admit only those words, like *sciovinismo*, which adapt themselves to the Italian linguistic system, and not recalcitrant ones, like *chauffeur*. An effective standard of pronunciation can no longer be proposed on the basis of Tuscan, and even less on Roman. A systematic standardization could not control the many centrifugal forces that operate on the literary language, and anyway would perpetuate its unpopularity.

On the other hand, given the social mobility of our times, it would be impossible to effect a coherent freedom or "liberalism" that would not lead to disintegration. An uninhibited selection of the natural forces of reconstruction,

valid in Verona, Cassino and Palermo during the Middle Ages, would satisfy our needs today as little as standardization. In the essential areas of spelling and morphology, the schools must overcome their present indifference and take up a position against the affable but awkward provincial intonations. But they must avoid confusing dialect with language, local intonations with Tuscan, slang with literary formulas, as if they could all be reduced to a higher unity.

They must constantly distinguish between the regional or dialectal variety and the literary language. The literary language should always be viewed as something superior to the dialect and also different from it, though the two are mutually interchangeable and open to reciprocal translation. From the elementary school level, the literary language must assert not its exclusiveness, but its participation in a dialogue with the dialects, its presence.

In the age-old debate that is still wearily carried on, our line of action should not be compromise but rather a third alternative, independence: this third alternative is formulated in the phrases "syntactic closure" and "stylistic receptivity." And "stylistic receptivity" means freedom of choice in vocabulary and constructions, but it does not mean either anarchy or deformation.

The literary use of popular or dialectal terms is merely an artistic fact, the isolated satisfaction of a particular need for expression; not an element of the linguistic tradition or an automatic link in its chain. Writers who indulge systematically in dialectal usage, slang expressions and crude vocabulary, in sentences which may have the vivacity but also the looseness of stenographic notes, are originators of linguistic provincialism: they do not further the cause of that popularity of the literary language which we are here advocating as one of the necessities of our time. Indeed, popularity, as it is to be understood here, rejects whatever is crude, dialectal and slovenly; it seeks not to deform, but to enrich the literary language, to open it up, to make it accessible and vital, without embalming or stultifying it.

Alongside this formal popularity there is the problem of an active popularity which would involve the reader and

make him an intimate participant in the act of writing. As far as the D'Annunzian current is concerned, of course, the way to this effort at collaboration is closed. For the reader who feels it to be unavoidably foreign, it is necessary to undertake constant translation, from a closed linguistic community to one genuinely communicative and open.

In contrast to this extreme case, however, the classical prose of Manzoni, with its imperishable standards, puts in the mouths of his characters impeccable words which have the effect of transfiguring them, and by this very means he induces the reader to collaborate. It is the reader who brings the characters back to earth in all the particularity of their lives and the humbleness of their speech. And Fogazzaro, in an often pedestrian prose, exhibits characters and language anchored in particular places; and he offers both to the reader so that, through inverse effect, he may transfer and elevate them to a universal plane. The Verga of *I Malavoglia*, in turn, simply by sacrificing certain syntactic scaffoldings, overturns the system of levels in the traditional narrative, and succeeds in fusing the discourse of the characters with the personality of the writer; and the reader interprets at one and the same time both author and episodes. As for exterior integration, the reader need only reconstruct the classical framework of the sentence, a sort of gymnastic exercise, healthy in itself but quite apart from the narrative.

Only an awareness of these different attitudes, only the maturity of the reader with respect to this ascent toward popularity, can complete and render productive the stability and adequacy attained by a linguistic tradition equally distant from formalism and arbitrariness.

Within the literary language the problems innate in every human society are restated in different words. But aspirations to democracy, popularity and liberty are broken up, in the vicissitudes of daily political life, into episodes. And in these, time after time, the dialogue deviates from reasonableness or degenerates into shouting; but precisely because of the perishability of its manifestations, the alternating ascendancy of one side or the other, and the resultant

skepticism, a balance is maintained, however tenuous it may seem.

Political actions find a common basis on the negative ground of reciprocal tolerance, of the acceptance of a certain number of legal, economic and social bonds. Immobility in politics is not unnatural. An abstract assumption of political wisdom and moderation is, on the other hand, useless and perhaps self-defeating.

None of this is sufficient for linguistic institutions. The common basis, accepted by everyone, consists of "active" conventions or agreements which tolerance alone cannot uphold. They are the conventions by which all of us, with our differences of intellect and temperament, succeed in understanding and creating something which is at once recognizable not only as Italian (rather than French), but as educated and social Italian (rather than slovenly and chaotic).

The problem of the popularity of the literary language is today, therefore, a social problem in which writers, teachers and readers are, consciously or unconsciously, participants. On the other hand, this active collaboration does not arise everywhere and at the same time. It cannot be exclusively the tenuous work of individuals or the massive work of schools. Rather, it is the task of, as it were, an atmosphere and of a region, in particular of that Italian region which, seven centuries ago, saw the birth of the tradition of a literary language, under conditions that did not close it to the taste and to the influence of the unlettered classes. That region is Tuscany.

Alongside the great examples inherited from the nineteenth century, the character of *Metello*¹³ shows us, with his problems and accents, those traditional traits whereby the conversation in the narrative is not an abstract translation of events, and the narrative does not do violence to the conversation, and the author is not a *deus ex machina* external to the narrative, and the reader finds himself in the presence of a tranquil and human composition.

The type of literary prose and the taste for it that we are advocating find their natural home in Tuscany, in its

grace, its prestige and its natural proximity of reader to writer; and they find in it the possibility of flourishing and being accepted among Italians of our time. As I have had occasion to say elsewhere, "in the middle of the twentieth century there seems discernible, along this new route that radiates from Tuscany, a period of active linguistic stability. Its popularity is neither Arcadian nor folklorish. Its literary activities have no time to become conventional.

"So Tuscany, discarded as a standard of pronunciation, now has its justification. For the very reason that it draws directly on a single source, this prose, neither rigid nor chaotic, seems likely to endure through the centuries, renewed, diverse and responsive."¹⁴

Translated by Stanford Drew and Lowry Nelson, Jr.

NOTES

(1) *Archivio glottologico italiano* (1873), p. 1 ff.

(2) *Aperçu d'une histoire de la langue greque* (3rd ed. Paris, 1930), p. 113 ff.

(3) *Ethik* (Stuttgart, 1886), p. 1 ff.

(4) *The Data of Ethics* (London-Edinburgh, 1879), p. III ff.

(5) Santoli, *Storia della letteratura tedesca* (Turin, 1955), p. 92.

(6) For this notion of "linguistic institutions" see my *Fondamenti di storia linguistica* (Florence, 1951), p. 26 ff.

(7) Mazzarino, *Aspetti sociali del IV secolo* (Rome, 1951).

(8) See my *Storia della lingua*

di Roma (2nd ed. Bologna, 1944), p. 337.

(9) *Ibid.*, p. 314 ff.

(10) In regard to this and what follows, see my *Profilo di storia linguistica italiana* (2nd ed. Florence, 1954), pp. 19-54.

(11) See Migliorini, *La questione della lingua*, and extract from *Problemi e orientamenti di storia letteraria*, ed. A. Momigliano, vol. III (Milan, 1948).

(12) In *Caffè*; see N. Valeri, *Pietro Verri* (Milan, 1937, p. 162.

(13) In Vasco Pratolini's novel *Metello* (1954).

(14) See my *Profilo* (cited in note 10), p. 157 f.

TRENDS



ITALIAN FICTION IN 1956

Since the end of the Second World War marked the beginning of a new age in Italian literature, a dominant and paradoxical trait of Italian fiction has been a reluctance to present itself merely as fiction. A sharp reaction then arose, in some of the younger writers it amounted to a revulsion, against that concept of "pure" literature, be it "hermetic" poetry or "evocative" prose, which many had prudently adhered to during the Fascist decades, and some had brilliantly honored. The story-tellers and novelists of the new persuasion were eager to come to grips with the harsher realities of their country's life, which, they felt, Italian fiction had overlooked for too long.

It is known that the new approach brought about a crop of good books; in some of them, however, the boundary between creative imagination and social reporting, or rather, between artistic representation and moral indictment, is often blurred; (a typical example of occasional confusion can be found in Vasco Pratolini's work). In the meantime, the *letterati* of the Old Guard, some of them undoubtedly outstanding, have been fighting a defensive action—they have been holding their ground. What is the battle-score at the end of 1956?

In the summer of 1956 as so often in the past, the annual *Premio Viareggio*, by far the most influential and indicative of Italian literary awards, has reflected the delicate balance between the two trends I have tried to define.

The main fiction award has been split between Carlo Levi, for his diary of a Sicilian tour, *Le parole sono pietre* ("Words are Stones," Einaudi, publ.), and Gianna Manzini, for her most ambitious novel so far, *La Sparviera* ("The She-Hawk," Mondadori, publ.).

For a quarter of a century, Gianna Manzini has been the most orthodox devotee of "lyrical" prose, of that kind of fiction, that is, which vies with poetry in subject matter as well as in stylistic texture; (reviewers in search of easy parallels have often called her "the Italian Virginia Woolf"). An "atmospheric" novel of great distinction, *La Sparviera* unfolds, or rather, distills, a series of memories of a man's life; the "epiphanies" in question, to borrow the Joycean term, are undoubtedly conjured up with refined skill.

Back in 1947, as many will remember, Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli* ushered in an original trend in Italian literature, the new social concern, with a preference for the South. *Le parole sono pietre*, a colorful travelogue in the author's traditional vein, though a much lesser achievement than his *Christ*, holds itself midway between high journalism and literature. There is no need to say more, since "*Words are Stones*" will soon be available in English.

Two other works, equally half-fiction and by new writers, deserve a very warm mention. Both are diaries, of a country judge in Cassino, and of a school teacher in a Sicilian village. The first is Dario Troisi's *Diario d'un giudice* ("Diary of a Judge"), and the other is Leonardo Sciascia's *Le parrocchie di Regalpetra* ("The Parishes of Regalpetra"); the publisher of both is Laterza. What makes these two books unusually good is their luminous truthfulness, and their successful attempt to raise a personal experience onto the plane of detached representation.

Another young writer's debut which has been warmly received, *Minuetto all'inferno* ("Minuet in Hell," Einaudi, publ.) by Elémir Zolla, is the only example of a "fantastic" novel in Italian literature in a very long time. To be precise, since the 1930's, when Alberto Moravia wrote a number of *racconti surrealisti e fantastici*, which, recently collected under the title of one of them ("L'epidemia,"

Bompiani, publ.), show an aspect of Moravia's art almost totally ignored by his foreign publishers and readers. Elémir Zolla's *Minuetto all'inferno* is a provocative experimental novel, a whimsical mixture of real events and imaginary flights. If he will rely, in the future, a little less on his sparkling mind and a little more on his feelings, Mr. Zolla may well prove to be a writer of the first rank.

Another important work which is certainly not realistic, though not the product of a single imagination, is *Fiabe italiane*, a monumental collection of Italian fairy-tales, gathered from the most various sources, written as well as oral, by a young novelist of talent, Italo Calvino, and lavishly printed and illustrated (Einaudi, publ.). In editing these *fiabe* with due respect for their traditional versions, Mr. Calvino has also displayed a narrative gift, which will help this sumptuous "argosy" to last very long and to be widely read.

Finally, it is a pleasure to report that, in the opinion of many and in my own, the best Italian narrative work of 1956 is one written in New York by a Tuscan of half-Russian parentage, who is now an American. A collection of stories widely acclaimed in Italy, where it received the Viareggio "first-book award," *Il segreto* ("The Secret," Garzanti, publ.) is the first work in Italian by Niccolò Tucci, whose short stories in English have often made the delight of the readers of *The New Yorker*. But very few, if any, of Tucci's Italian tales remind one of the tone of that witty magazine. The best of *Il segreto* lies in its long wonderful title-story, and in another novelette called *Morte di Scarandogi* ("Death of Scarandogi"), both as original as they are deep. Tucci has the freshness and directness of the born narrator, and he is also happily immune from the canonic vices of so much Italian fiction, rhetoric and sentimentally. I shouldn't be surprised if Niccolò Tucci, whose mind is cosmopolitan while his sensibility is well rooted in his native past, were soon to endow Italian literature with an excellent novel.

PAOLO MILANO

BOOKS

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THE OLD WAY

The New American Library, which from the beginning has had a leading part in the great success of the culturally important "paperback," has now issued, in its Mentor Books series, at 50 cents, the *Reader's Companion to World Literature* (under the general editorship of Calvin S. Brown; formerly published by the Dryden Press, 1956). This book will then go into the hands of many students and "general readers," for, while the ordinary publisher thinks in terms of thousands, pocket-book publishers seem more at home in the hundreds of thousands. This is one more reason for watching these publications carefully; they can do considerable good and also some harm. Even apart from that, all readers' guides, "companions" to literature, and the like, are interesting as thermometers of the average information and taste of a period. In fact, one can be statistical about it, one can take measurements; since this book is in the form of a dictionary ("a guide to the enjoyment and knowledge of the immortal masterpieces of writing, from the dawn of civilization to the present"), a crude but tempt-

ing way to examine it is to see the ratings given the various authors, periods, movements in terms of the number of pages or lines accorded to each.

Naturally what concerns us here are the Italian entries. The question which can receive a rough answer is: How does Italian literature stand in the world-picture of the compilers of this dictionary, a picture which we may assume to be typical, or at least, influential, since the book is meant for school usage?

Let us take some measurements. It may be assumed, of course, that the emphasis of the book is on English materials, that the perspective is that of the English-reading student; hence, for instance, the entry on Matthew Arnold is eight times as long as the one on Leopardi. But referring particularly to Italian, what we notice is the usual scantiness of information on modern literature; and an emphasis on the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, which, in such a context, appears even out of proportion. While Castiglione, for instance, rates 72 lines, Goldoni scores only 30. There are interesting situations even among the

earlier writers themselves: for instance Boccaccio is slightly higher than Dante, and Petrarch is higher than both, although some of this is balanced by entries under the titles of their works, and the *Divine Comedy*, of course, is given the largest treatment. The Renaissance entries are interesting too; Machiavelli is naturally very high (under author's name, in fact, he is slightly higher than Dante): Castiglione is higher than probably any Italian compiler would have placed him, a fact which can be understood from the English angle of vision; and there is a curiously wide difference between Ariosto and Tasso: the first is given four times as much space as the second, who has a singularly low rating of about 20 lines (Pico della Mirandola, for instance, scores considerably higher than he).

The modern situation is, as we said, characterized by scarcity. Reconstructing even a ghost of a development of modern Italian literature from the few entries available here would be an impossible task; the book reflects a view of modern world literature which gives Italy a very peripheral place when it doesn't altogether exclude it. Of eighteenth-century writers, Metastasio and Parini are absent; of nineteenth-century ones, for instance, Foscolo is not mentioned. The selection and treatment of the few who are listed, are on the whole perfunctory; in a strange way they appear sometimes to depend on a con-

ception of Italian writers based especially on their "nationalistic" significance and themes, a conception which is, to say the least, singularly outmoded in any serious work done by recent criticism on those authors. Thus one is surprised to find that in terms, again, of number of lines, Carducci rates higher than Leopardi; and the short-short entries on Alfieri (reducing the "spirit" of his tragedies to "Romantic nationalism") and on d'Annunzio (giving the impression that in the latter part of his life he was a fascist propagandist) are so sketchy and misleading as to be really worse than nothing.

To conclude, the interest of the Italian entries in this book is that of a period-piece; in the "average" conception of Italian culture, and ultimately in the progress of Italian studies, they reflect and put on record a phase which we feel is now being superseded by one of closer inspections and indispensable reevaluations.

[P.M.P.]

MR. TUCCI'S SECRET

In several ways Niccolò Tucci's *Il Segreto* (Milan: Garzanti, 1956) is a remarkable book. First, it is easily one of the best ever written by an "Italian-American," if not the best. I do not mean to suggest either that that is a literary category or that the word really conveys anything very precise. Yet it may be instructive, or at least impressive, to reflect that any

parallel might have to be sought in the *Memorie* of Lorenzo Da Ponte (Mozart's librettist who found himself teaching Italian at Columbia in the early part of the last century). Since such a category might seem to lack substance, I hasten to say, secondly, that the book is remarkable for the fact that parts of it deal with this country, not as an exotic waste land, but as a place inhabited by susceptible human creatures. In fact, Mr. Tucci is exclusively concerned to create rounded characters and significant environments, and not to speculate idly on supposed national traits.

Such remarkable qualities, however, are merely external. Most essential is the fact that Mr. Tucci has written an important collection of stories, several of which are excellent. They happen to be written in Italian and their author, born in Switzerland and raised near Florence, happens to have lived mostly in New York for the past twenty years: facts which may be interpreted at liberty. Yet it should be said in passing that our freedom of interpretation is somewhat compromised by the autobiographical *form* in which the stories (all except one) are cast. In effect, the reader is presented with a nice dilemma: should he or should he not assume that the narratives are pure fiction? Actually, of course, part of the fiction is the frankly autobiographical manner in which the narrator reveals his fictive character.

Geographically, the stories

have to do with rural Tuscany and with urban New York. In Italy there is the tense household of the Russian-born mother who hopes by legal action to wrest her inheritance from the hands of the usurper Lenin; the Italian father who in the meantime acts as the local country doctor; and the sensitive children who are immersed in the enormous task of growing up and finding a perspective to put their parents in. Then there is the first-person son, now in New York, now with children of his own, who exerts himself to see things as they, his children, do; to become one of them, with the ulterior motive of seeing what kind of a father (always in relation to his own father's fatherhood) he is. In the story "Figli e Padri" the narrator, during the last war, meditates in his New York apartment on his "enemy" father now in hostile territory in Italy, the father he had so often thought his natural enemy in the war between children and parents.

One thing all of Mr. Tucci's stories have in common is a casual beginning: one could never predict from the way they begin just how they will develop. In the shorter stories, this has the air of mannerism. But in the longer ones he achieves quite a different effect: the apparent trivialities, eccentricities, absurdities of existence begin gradually to make themselves accepted and eventually to cast a cosmic reflection in the midst of their particularity. In the first story "Il

Segreto," a long one of ninety pages, the narrator keeps returning with apparent casualness to a lonely and mangy old cypress tree. It is clear quite early in the story that the tree is going to have to carry a certain weight of symbolism; and yet the reader does not quail, first, because it is, so to speak, an honest, open, functional symbol, and then perhaps because there is a saving comic contrast between the buffeted and broken tree and the young misunderstood boy. The symbol, then, is not appliqué: indeed, one has the impression that the story is not narrated chronologically, but rather that it circulates somehow about the old cypress tree.

Now that we know, or think we know, what Moravia and Vittorini can do, we must be gratefully surprised at Mr. Tucci's hard-cover debut. True, in the shorter pieces, one finds now and then a sharp perception expressed too patly, too designingly, indeed too cutely. Inevitably we are reminded of his main slick "outlet" in English, the *New Yorker*. It is an open scandal that that still indispensable magazine is addicted to a preciosity and a sentimental cuteness that sometimes make its most faithful readers wince. But cuteness and sentimentality are not, fortunately, Mr. Tucci's vices: in his best stories and passages, humor is properly a vacation from pain and sentiment a "by-product" of inevitability. In his best work there is a proper tension between the ironic tone

and the passion of what is narrated.

In what, for example, seems his best story, the long "Morte di Scarandogi," we find a complex characterization of an ageing and then a dying miser, whose eccentricity at first repels us with its grotesqueness. Then we come to admire the uncompromising miserliness of the man and the total lack of hypocrisy with which he follows his ruling passion. The hypocrites are his would-be heirs, all except his son Piero, who is as honest and, in the eyes of his relations, as cold as his father. It is through Piero that the author presents his satire of the hypocrisy surrounding the dying tyrant. When the question of funeral arrangements arises, and people begin talking of what *he* would have preferred, Piero says "But he would have preferred not to die at all." Piero proposes answering the conventional telegrams of condolence in such replies as: "ETERNITY MORAL VALUES VERIFIED THANKS FOR REFERENCE" or "CONFIRM ACCEPTANCE DIVINE WILL." All in all, a good sample of the profoundly humorous tone of the story would be the following: "For five days they all awaited his death, as a signal to open drawers, to ransack, to knock down doors, to open windows and air out the house. The relations were notified, and they all arrived and were put up in the house almost on the sly, for fear that the dying man might come to

know of the hospitality that he, with his own money, was offering his future heirs."

Mr. Tucci also presents an English face. For some years he has published short stories in such "slicks" as *Harper's* and the *New Yorker*. His "The Siege," of a piece with his Tuscan stories in Italian, was chosen as one of the *Best American Short Stories, 1947* (ed. Martha Foley, Boston 1947). His English style is as accomplished as his Italian; clearly, he feels a continuum of style and content close enough to deter him from giving both English and Italian versions of the same story. If he chose to do so, the two would not be mutual translations in the usual mechanical sense of that word. If news of a novel in progress should be actualized, we can confidently expect that, whatever the language, it will be a definitive expression of some meaningful cosmos of characters.

[L.N.]

ITALY AND THE ALLIES.

If ever proof is required that academicians need not be dull writers, Professor Norman Kogan's book *Italy and the Allies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956) could easily be offered as Exhibit A. Using a variety of sources, Kogan has pieced together an interesting story. It is an account of Italian politics between 1943 and 1947 as affected by the military and political policies of the Allies—Britain, France,

the United States, the Soviet Union. Those fateful years, from the fall of Mussolini to the Peace Treaty, are subjected to detailed analysis; events are interpreted and evaluated both from the viewpoint of the time that decisions were made and from the perspective of several years' hindsight.

Mussolini's sudden demise caught the Allies unprepared. Having no historic interest in the Mediterranean area, the United States deferred to British policies. Both major powers agreed initially on short-run objectives, but soon differences arose over long-term solutions. The turning point in the American attitude came in 1944 which marks the start of a permanent American interest in Italy. From that year on, the United States was pledged to help Italy achieve economic and political conditions favorable to the development of democratic institutions and policies. Significantly, American policy toward Italy was influenced by our presidential election campaigns. The manner and timing of American actions in Italy were affected by the push and pull of our domestic politics.

During the critical period, Italian foreign policy was directed toward achieving status and favorable peace terms. These objectives were not realized. The almost complete disregard for the Italian viewpoint during the peace negotiations came about because East and West were locked in struggle. In other words, the prob-

lem of Italy was merely a phase in the great post-war contest between the Soviet Union and the Western powers; requirements of this power struggle ruined Italian hopes for better treatment.

Sparing no nation, no individual, in his criticism, Kogan forthrightly passes judgment on the actions taken by the Allies and by groups and persons in Italy. He conveys a strong impression that the Allies helped to perpetuate the existing social structure of Italy. Immediate military and political considerations were responsible, of course. If social and economic reforms have not materialized in the last decade, the blame does not rest solely with the Italians. In readable form, Professor Kogan has provided us with the necessary background to understand present-day Italy.

[DAVID G. FARRELLY]

Enrico M. Fusco, *Scrittori e idee*. Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana. (Turin: S. E.I. 1956)

As the sub-title indicates, *Scrittori e idee* is a dictionary of Italian literature. One might even look upon it as an ample history of Italian literature in dictionary form, for, not only does it list every Italian author of any significance, but also literary terms, movements and journals.

As one might suppose, in preparing for such a vast undertaking, the author (a seventy-year old professor who has

taught Italian and Latin literatures for over thirty years) had to establish first of all the necessary criteria for deciding whom and what to include in his dictionary. Professor Fusco states in the preface that "a dictionary of Italian literature evidently cannot include all the people who speak and write correctly the Italian language, but only *writers-authors*." But, logically, it would be impossible to include, for example, all the contributors to the one-hundred-odd literary reviews which are published in Italy today. Professor Fusco had a difficult problem to solve, to be sure, and he solved it thus: a dictionary of literature aimed at the cultured middle class should include a writer only if he has produced various works of recognized stylistic value, or even a single one of recognized stylistic excellence. He decided to exclude the very young writers, even if thought to be *sure bets*: let them give more concrete evidence of their true merit, and their names will be included in a later edition.

Even if, as the old and somewhat trite adage goes, comparisons are odious, this reviewer could not resist the temptation to compare the present work with the old acquaintance *Dizionario storico della letteratura italiana*, which was originally published by Vittorio Turri in 1900, and later revamped and brought up to date, first by Umberto Renda (1941), and then by Pietro Operti (1952). The two works are as one would expect,

very similar, but, fortunately, also different one from the other. The entries common to both works are decidedly treated in greater detail in the *Dizionario storico*, which by the way, comes close to being twice as long as *Scrittori e idee*. I hasten to add, however, that the information given under each entry by Professor Fusco is sufficient, and, considering the goal, leaves little to be desired. The number of entries is considerably larger in the latter. A comparison of entries under the letter A reveals that the *Dizionario storico* includes only two entries not to be found in *Scrittori e idee* - Girolamo Aleandro and Lucilla Antonelli—whereas the latter takes up the following "new" names: Luigi Albertini, Alberto Albertini, Garibaldo Alessandrini, Augusto Alfani, Gaetano Alimonda, Antonio Aliotta, Barbara Allason, Luigi Ambrosini, Giovanni Amendola, Nicola Amore, Giovanni Vittorio Amoretti, Luciano Anceschi, Andrea Angiulli, Camillo Antona Traversi, Luigi Antonelli, Mario Antoniotti, Carlo Antoni, Luisa Anzoletti, Vladimiro Arancio Ruiz, Giuseppe Ardaù, Giuseppe Artale, Roberto Assagioli, Maria Luisa Astaldi. Furthermore, it includes: *Alphabetum narrationum* (a XIV century work), *Antologia* (i.e. "Anthology," not the periodical founded by Vieusseux), *Arte*, *Arte per l'arte*, and *Astrattismo*. Other interesting entries included in *Scrittori e idee* and not in *Dizionario storico* are the follow-

ing: *Convivium*, *Corriere della sera*, *Critica*, *Critica ermetica*, *Ronda*, *Cultura*, *Fanfulla della domenica*, *Decadentismo*, *Dizione*, *Eloquenza*, *Giallo*, *Lectura Dantis*, *Prosa*, *Poesia*, *Rima*, *Ritmo*, *Romanzo*, *Traduzioni*, and others.

As for the bibliographies which follow the various entries, those listed by the *Dizionario storico* are by far the fuller; on the other hand, as one would expect, the more recent studies are listed only in *Scrittori e idee*. The bibliography of the latter, then, is more selective and more up to date. Moreover, in certain instances Professor Fusco gives his own evaluation of a bibliographical item; in others he quotes directly from the work of a critic he includes. At the end of Professor Fusco's volume one finds two useful indices: one of pseudonyms, and one of the authors cited only in the bibliography.

Like the old companion *Dizionario storico*, Professor Fusco's handsome and very readable volume will undoubtedly find many friends among students of literature and the cultured public as well.

[C. S.]

BEWARE OF TUSCANS

An old Italian adage purports that, "He who associates with Tuscans must keep his eyes peeled." The same advice is in order for the non-Tuscan Italian who is about to read Curzio Malaparte's latest book.

The unpredictable author of *Kaputt* and *The Skin* has done it again, many will say. *Maledetti Toscani* (*Damn these Tuscans*) is a strange but clever book: and very clever is the bright red jacket which has the author's surname repeated vertically eight times in black, with the yellow title slanted across in italics. The reverse would have been equally effective, and perfectly in accord with the spirit of the book.

There is no doubt that in writing his panegyric of everything Tuscan, the author had as much fun as the reader has—especially if he is a Tuscan himself—in reading it. The non-Tuscan reader will probably ask himself at every page, "Can this be true?" Which calls to mind an anecdote! It seems that some years ago two young men were debating about the veracity of something they had read in one of Malaparte's works. They decided to call on the author himself, and to ask him directly. Malaparte listened to them and then replied with a straight face: "Of course it is true! I invented it myself!"

The various chapters of *Maledetti Toscani* are introduced by captions which are direct quotations from the body of the text. These captions are so cleverly chosen that they reveal more about the nature of the book than one could explain in one or two pages. Here are a few: "And best of all it would be, if in Italy there were more Tuscans, and less Italians;" "The whole history of Italy and of Europe sooner or

later ends up in Prato: in Prato, with its [history's] rags . . . ;" "Your father's mustache!" (battle-cry of the people from Prato and of the Florentines);" "Oh the lovely girls of Leghorn, every two months they have a son;" "Tuscans are the evil conscience of Italy;" "Tuscans have Heaven in their eyes, and Hell in their mouths."

In a conversational, sparkling style, Malaparte relates all in one breath the marvelous characteristics of Tuscans, especially of Florentines, shuttling back and forth from the present day to the Renaissance and to the days of that great story teller, Franco Sacchetti. Everything is personified and everything comes to life: nature, history, and art; even the statue of Giovanni dalle Bande Nere in Piazza San Lorenzo in Florence has its own story to tell; all to help the author penetrate the complicated personality of his wonderful fellow-Tuscans. I said wonderful, but I should have said super-human! Here's why. "Everybody knows that all Italians are intelligent, but few are willing to admit that Tuscans are more intelligent by far than all other Italians;" "Even the simplest things, the most humble, the most ordinary things, in Tuscany acquire a certain special something that makes them miraculous;" "We Tuscans turn Paradise over to all other Italians, Lombards, Piedmontese, Sicilians and Neapolitans who aspire to Paradise in the same manner they aspire to a pen-

sion; we are satisfied with living like free men, that is to say, like Christians;" "Thank God we Tuscans are different from every other nation." Of course one cannot take the author seriously! (I cannot, though a Tuscan myself). How could one ever take Malaparte seriously, since he does not take himself seriously! *Maledetti Toscani*, then, is a panegyric of Tuscans, but a panegyric full of paradoxes and irony. "One never grows tired of listening to them [Tuscans]: and one can never catch them uttering a profanity, a swear-word, never. (If, at times, they swear, they do it in a whisper, unwillingly, blushing, and only most rarely; they do it out of sheer necessity, and only when they are actually compelled to do it. They swear only when God, or some saint, has it in for them personally; the trouble is that God and the Saints always have it in for them.) In short, as everybody knows, they are shy, modest, lovable, generous and courteous. And it is only fair to recognize that, without Tuscany, Italy would be nothing but a slice of Europe."

Strange as it may seem at this point, the poetic is not completely absent from *Maledetti Toscani*. Some of the landscapes are deftly drawn, and with a true sense of the pictorial. "Oh the beautiful women of Leghorn, with their well-shaped shoulders, their round arms, and their foreheads spacious as a windowsill. Just like a windowsill overlooking the

sea. Where tall masts with white sails glide before pots of geraniums, and blue clouds cross a vermillion sky. The houses seem made of flesh, and it is indeed the rose-grey, the rose-yellow, the rose-green color of the walls that imparts to the houses a touch of young, firm and smooth flesh, where the marine sun relaxes, stretched out with open legs. On the façades and on the streets there are beautiful ripe-melon-like slices of sun, and at eventide a golden juice drips from the eaves and from the window shutters, a warm and aromatic juice which inebriates the swallows. And the swallows no longer dart across the rooftops with their piercing screeches, but float about with wide-spread wings, as if drunk. They totter through the sonorous air, and bump their heads against the patches of blue which the sunset leaves dangling over the roofs."

At the very beginning of his book, Malaparte says that, "In the presence of a Tuscan, everyone feels uneasy;" undoubtedly, non-Tuscans will feel uneasy in reading his latest work, that is, if they do not possess a good dose of humor, for humor is the main ingredient of the book. It is true that, like a good Tuscan, Malaparte paints a most flattering picture of Tuscans, but it is evident that he does it with tongue in cheek, and with the smile of Dante's devil who said to the shivering soul of Hell: "You did not think that I was a logician!"

[C. S.]

SITUATION OF CONTEMPORARY LYRIC POETRY

Two anthologies, of very different kinds and intents, seem usefully to reflect the situation of contemporary lyric poetry in Italy. One is *Antologia popolare di poeti del novecento* ("A popular anthology of nineteenth-century poetry"), by Vittorio Masselli and G. A. Cibotto (Florence: Vallecchi, 1956); the other is Enrico Falqui's *La giovane poesia: Saggio e repertorio* ("Young poetry: an essay and a collection;" Rome: Colombo, 1956). Chronologically, the Masselli-Cibotto selections cover the period from Umberto Saba (born 1883) to Salvatore Quasimodo (born 1901); a second volume will follow. The book therefore includes, besides such "easier" poets as Jahier, Palazzeschi, Cardarelli, the major exponents of "difficult" or "hermetic" poetry, Montale, Ungaretti, and Quasimodo himself. The keyword of the book is, of course, the *popolare* of the title: it undertakes to make that poetry a part of the "popular" heritage. The compilers address the reader in plain language: "You are one of the many who during their school years have read poems by Dante, Petrarca, Foscolo, Leopardi, Carducci, Pascoli, d'Annunzio . . . but if you hear about twentieth-century poetry you perceive distinctly, at the bottom of your memory, only *La signorina Felicita* by Guido Gozzano. Of the other twentieth-century poets you have a

pale idea because no literary critic of our time has talked to you about them in simple language in the ordinary papers read by the ordinary citizen. If you have stumbled on a literary magazine, your breath failed . . ." Each group of selections includes a statement by the poet himself; some of these, as in the case of Palazzeschi or Ungaretti, have a significance that goes beyond the occasion. Each poem is preceded by a rather long analysis, of a very close and elementary type.

It is difficult to say whether an anthology of this sort will help make modern Italian poetry any more popular; a plausible view is that it rather memorializes a trend which existed in the first place; for years now, the young reader who cultivates poetry at all in Italy, has taken Montale and Quasimodo very much for granted; if he found a standard poetic aura, a prevailing poetic speech, as d'Annunzio's was to earlier generations, it is the one established by such poets as the *ermetici*. It is interesting to know that this anthology, which incidentally may be of particular use to foreign readers of Italian poetry, has now been widely adopted in secondary schools in Italy.

While the Masselli-Cibotto anthology places the "hermetic" poets practically in the position of schoolroom classics, the passing of poetic time is indicated even more sharply by Enrico Falqui's book—by the

fact that such a book should be conceivable at all. It is an anthology of post-World War II poets. It excludes not only the "classics" mentioned above but even anyone born before 1915. It manages nevertheless to assemble selections from as many as 98 young poets. Of these, only very few like Giorgio Bassani or Pier Paolo Pasolini have any reputation outside the little magazines (of which a considerable number have appeared more or less sporadically since 1945). Their poetic output, as is typical in our time everywhere, has been accompanied and supported by critical and polemic statements. On the whole, the most characteristic preoccupations seem to be with the contents and the communicability of poetry. As Falqui puts it in the introductory essay, where he attempts objectively to discern the main lines of opinion among the latest poets, they generally seem to favor the immersion of poetry into "the fullness of life, even at the risk of extra-poetic contaminations and even through a language which can sometimes show sharp closeness to spoken discourse" (p. 11), and a transition from "pure" to "impure" poetry: "If pure poetry implies 'total detachment from life,' then impure poetry is better. Break the circle. Jump across the ditch. From abstract to concrete. From monologue to dialogue. From isolation to engagement. From evasion to communion. From fragment to structure." This sounds hardly new or far-

fetched; it becomes relevant if it is supported by a large body of relatively respectable poetry. Some of the results can be observed even externally, in such elements as the greater length of poems and their discursive quality, and the immediate currency of some of their themes. The keywords of the "new" trends may again be the two most fashionable words in the Italian cultural-political jargon of today: *dialogo* and *istanza*. *Dialogo* in this case implies a craving for the communications of speech and ideas beyond the "private formulae" of the "hermetic" tradition; *istanza* is the issue, the problem, the search for cultural and moral "engagement." Some of this poetry can indeed be bracketed under the two most inclusively formulated *istanze*, the social and the religious, as Falqui points out (pp. 31-32). For all this, drawing too sharp a line of demarcation between the new poets and the newly acquired "classics" would be unwarranted and misleading, however polemical the attitude of some of the younger ones may be toward their predecessors. Actually a closer inspection of their poetic idiom would reveal the almost constant presence of the linguistic atmosphere in which they grew; at first glance, the most definite general influence seems to be that of Salvatore Quasimodo. But only the study of definite illustrations will help clarify the matter in any concrete sense.

[P. M. P.]

UNORTHODOXY AND CULTURE

In his latest book, *Saper leggere* ("How to Read," Milan: Garzanti, 1956), Professor Prezzolini has put aside the overwhelming bitterness characteristic of his latest books and has presented us with an interesting, if somewhat unorthodox volume. Orthodoxy has never been a "forte" of Prezzolini and we are not surprised. What is surprising is that he should have taken such great pains to present unorthodoxly a very orthodox concept of culture.

At bottom the book is an attempt to lead the uninitiated into the world of learning. The question is what sort of learning; for there seem to be various kinds: popular, individual, and the learning which academic tradition has preserved. Prezzolini is a self-taught man — a fact which anyone who has known him personally or is acquainted with his writing is not prone to forget easily. There is little doubt that no other accomplishment of his life has given Giuseppe Prezzolini as much satisfaction as that of having become a university professor without a university degree. The book then is for those who by choice, or by circumstances, have decided to take the lonely road to culture. According to the author he intended his work for Italians, but we find so many references suggestive of American methods of learning and research, not only in orientation,

but in the very mechanics of the process, that it seems doubtful that Italian students could profit by it. Suffice it to mention the profound differences in the organization, workings, and concept of a library in the two countries. Furthermore, and in spite of the repeated denials of academic culture as such, Prezzolini is really trying to popularize those same orthodox, academic, and traditional methods of learning he so much disdains. As a matter of fact he does such a good job of it that one might suggest, *horribile dictu*, that the book be adopted as a school text.

Having said all this, one can freely admit that, as usual, Prezzolini is a very interesting, acutely intelligent, and very instructive writer. Most interesting is Prezzolini's concept of culture which he regards as a "personal adventure" which, he adds, can and must exist only within the framework of a social group. On the question of instruments of culture (libraries, bibliographies, reference books, etc.) he makes a disturbing statement: "Actually, in no human activity do instruments have great importance, and in the field of culture they perhaps have none at all." I say this is a disturbing statement because a good part of the book is devoted precisely to a very minute examination of these very instruments. Disappointing is the fact that Prezzolini makes no attempt to interpret culture in its philosophical implications. He had done this much earlier in his

career as a writer and his words on the subject remain still one of the best examinations of the problem in Italy. It would have been extremely stimulating to have had a fresh reappraisal of those concepts at the present time.

[C. L. G.]

CARDUCCI WITHOUT RHETORIC

February 16th of this year marked the fiftieth anniversary of Giosuè Carducci's death. More than perhaps any other modern Italian poet, Carducci needs critical revision and new focussing; the present anniversary may be a good occasion for that. His generally scarce reputation outside Italy is partly due to the fact that, like all poets who are supposed to deal mainly with patriotic themes, he looks like a strictly internal affair of his country; this situation dimly reflects his status in Italy as national bard (*vates*). Like political freedom, liberation from the critical impasse can be started only by forces within the country itself.

So far, the anniversary has brought one important contribution in that direction, Luigi Russo's *Carducci senza retorica* (Bari: Laterza, 1957). The "rhetorical" view which the book will help to supplant includes not only the *vates* notion but also the clichés of the optimistic nature-poet and of the officiating historical poet; the

twin rhetorical evils of *sanità* (wholesomeness) and *romanità* (Romanness) are debunked. The revision is conducted in many ways; various critical approaches are adopted (historical, linguistic); the book is hardly a systematic study of the poet's work and it rather reflects, like a good deal of contemporary Italian criticism, the temperament and manner of the particular critic. To choose one small illustration out of hundreds, Russo explains the unbelievable success of *Il bove* ("The Ox;" one of the most famous sonnets in the language, widely translated), partly in social terms, for it reflects a bourgeois or even *padronale* attitude toward rural life (p. 270); he finds the sonnet *A un asino* ("To an Ass") a much more congenial emblem for Carducci's real spirit, a better correlative for the poet's "be-grudged melancholy" (p. 325). Carducci's "historical" poems similarly seem to reflect the observer's melancholy and a solemn, rather than a triumphant and bellicose view of the country's past. Hence, Russo maintains, Carducci was misunderstood and misused, "his Rome was soon put aside, and another and more alluring one was moulded, to which Gabriele d'Annunzio contributed, and even Pascoli a little, and then all the politicians who have afflicted our existence in the last forty years." (p. 277).

[P. M. P.]

ITEMS

A "ROME THEATRE GROUP" has been established in Rome. The sponsoring committee is composed of Emilio Cecchi, Alberto Moravia, Mario Soldati, Leonida Repaci, C. Gordon Goldie, Amelita Stacy, Bernard Wall, and Mario Montesi. The "Rome Theatre Group" will be permanent and will present plays in English only. Its first season is to open with Shaw's *The Millionairess* with Dawn Addams in the leading role.

CASA EDITRICE SANSONI has undertaken the publication of *Ulisse* a review of international culture directed by Maria Luisa Astaldi.

LONGANESI AND CO. is preparing an edition in Italian translation of some of Damon Runyon's writings on New York. The volume will, of course, bear the title of *Bulli e pupe* (Guys and Dolls).

THE RESULTS OF THE VIAREGGIO literary competition, "Premio Viareggio," the most important annual compe-

tition in Italy, were as follows for 1956:

Narrative works: First prize of two million lire, *ex aequo*, to Gianna Manzini for the novel *La sparviera* ("The She-Hawk"), and to Carlo Levi for *Le parole sono pietre* ("Words Are Stones"). Honorable mention went to Enrico Emanuelli for his *Il quaderno Indiano* ("Indian Notebook"), to Marcello Venturi for his *Il treno degli Appennini* ("The Appennine Train"), and to Carlo Montella for his *Incendio al catasto* ("Fire at The Registry Office").

Poetry: First prize of a million lire to Giacomo Noventa for his volume of verse *Versi e poesie*. Honorable mention went to Camillo Sbarbaro for his *Rimanezze e fuochi fatui* ("Residues and Will-o'-the-Wisps"), to Sandro Penna for his *Una strana gioia di vivere* ("A Strange Joy in Living"), and to Giuseppe Villaroel for his *Quasi canto d'aprile* (Almost a Song of April").

Essays: First prize, *ex aequo*, to Nino Valeri for his *Da Giolitti a Mussolini* ("From Giolitti to Mussolini"), and to Giancarlo Vigorelli for his biography of the President of

the Italian Republic, *Gronchi—Battaglie di oggi e di ieri* ("Gronchi—Struggles of Today and Yesterday"). Honorable mention went to Luigi Ronga for his *Arte e gusto nella storia della musica* ("Art and Taste in the History of Music"), and to Manlio Ciardo for his *L'uomo copernicano* ("The Copernican Man").

For a first work: First prize of one half million lire went to Niccolò Tucci for his volume *Il segreto* ("The Secret"). Honorable mention went to Ugo Pirro for his *Le soldatesse* ("The Women Soldiers") and to Rolando Viani for *I ragazzi della spiaggia* ("Beach-Children").

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GETTING ALONG IN ITALIAN by Mario Pei will appear on or about May first, published by Harper. It is one of a series of six volumes on a practical approach to language study. The book grew out of an article in *Holiday*, but the material has been extended and will contain about 100 pages of phrases for the tourist in Italy, an outline of Italian grammar, and a full two-way vocabulary.

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ITALIAN CULTURE IN TRANSITION is the name of a new course on the synthesis of fields in the humanities being offered this spring, on an experimental basis, by three departments of the University of California at Berkeley.

Known as History 130, the course will be taught jointly by three professors from the departments of Art and Architecture, History, and Music. It will attempt to define the nature of development in Italian culture from the Renaissance to the Baroque age. Lectures will concentrate on the role of Florence in the fifteenth century, Rome in the early sixteenth century, and Venice in the period 1550-1650.

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VITO PANDOLFI, the Italian dramatic critic, known also for his strongly leftist feelings in politics, has published an anthology of plays *Teatro italiano del dopoguerra* ("Italian Post-War Theatre"). With the exception of Ugo Betti's piece, the other ten plays have so far remained unpublished. In spite of the fact that the selection of the authors and their plays, and the critical introductions of the compiler, can easily become the object of controversy, the volume has the advantage of offering a sample, even if limited, of contemporary Italian theatre.

●

NUOVA ACCADEMIA EDITRICE, the very ambitious publishing firm of Milano which has undertaken the publication of a "history and anthology of the literatures of the world," proudly announces that a Spanish publisher has bought the rights to a Spanish translation of the *Thesaurus Litter-*

arum, the section of the world literary history dealing with Italian literature. When completed, this section will consist of fifty volumes, and in their Spanish translation will represent the largest single translation of Italian authors in one stroke. The first five volumes, dealing with the Italian theatre, have already been published. They were compiled and edited by Silvio D'Amico and Eligio Possenti, and they include all the major works of the Italian theatre from the origins to present day.

●

CONFUSION WITHIN COMMUNIST RANKS, and the chances of a strong democratic Left through unification of the socialist parties, have continued to be major issues among politically aware intellectuals in Italy during the last quarter. The difficulties of a *dialogue* between the democratic Left and the communists have been dramatized by an exchange of open letters between Ivan Anissimov, director of the Moscow Institute of World Literature and member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and Ignazio Silone. (Cf. "Un dialogo difficile: dal disgelo al neo-stalinismo," *Tempo presente*, February 1957).

The defections within the Italian Communist Party, made overt either by resignation or expulsion, and widely publicized by the newspapers, seem to be a consequence of a long ripening process rather than of

the obvious reaction to Hungarian events. Prominent among intellectuals who have left the party are the writer Fabrizio Onofri, the critic Gaetano Trombatore, the painters Purificato and Leoncillo, and Natalino Sapegno, professor of Italian at the University of Rome.

Naturally, among those who remained within the ranks, there were new displays of self-discipline; the most dramatic case among these was that of Concetto Marchesi, former professor of Latin at Padua and a prominent party figure, whose gloomily orthodox statement at the latest congress of the Italian Communist Party was followed shortly thereafter by his death. To complete the picture, some Catholic sources have suggested a notion of Marchesi's search for God *in extremis*. While his public position will be interesting to the psychological biographer and the chronicler of the intellectual confusions of our time, obituaries have emphasized the image of a brilliant historian of Latin literature, and of an unforgettable teacher.

●

THE TWO MAJOR recent fiction events in Italy are by authors whose previous work is known to the English-reading public: *L'isola di Arturo*, by Elsa Morante (Turin: Einaudi, 1957); and *Il segreto di Luca*, by Ignazio Silone (Milan: Mondadori, 1957).

Elsa Morante's story is told in the first person by the young protagonist, Arturo, and the main line of the action is his relationship to a hero-worshipped father and to a young step-mother. The background is the island of Procida near Naples; the general atmosphere and the quality of the narrative, as in her previous work *Menzogna e sortilegio* (translated in the United States as *House of Liars*) are a mixture of the realistic and the fabulous; the language itself has a highly formalized poetic quality and yet contains, both in vocabulary and structure, important Neapolitan overtones. The book, as is customary with major Einaudi publications, was presented in the publisher's Roman offices to a public including the whole of the literary *élite*; the laudatory presentation was made by Giacomo Debenedetti in a long critical lecture. The book is already regarded as the leading candidate for the Strega Prize (one of the country's two major literary prizes; the other, the Viareggio Prize, was received by the author for her previous novel).

Silone's book can be only superficially related to what is known in Italy as yellow literature, though it does contain, in a very special and indirect way, elements of the detective story. It concerns a judicial error; the intentional victim of it is Luca, who has chosen long imprisonment rather than using an alibi which would have involved revealing

a love secret. Even after his undeserved expiation Luca would keep his secret if Andrea, a character which is a transparent disguise for Silone himself, did not discover it through "detective" work which is, in reality, a search into deep moral and religious motivations.

This is regarded by many readers as Silone's most poignant and mature book, though the usual reservations about him as a literary artist are taken into account in critical reviews. Such reservations, as is well known, have existed ever since Silone's return to Italy and his recognition in his own country after the fall of fascism. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that he has since then been leading a much happier, a more articulate life as a novelist, a man of letters, an editor, and a political figure in Rome, than he did during his long exile from the fascist tyranny, even though in those remote years he was the only Italian writer whom free-world literary journalists bothered to inform themselves about. The novel is appearing simultaneously in *Lettres Nouvelles*.

●

I VANDALI IN CASA ("Vandals in the Home") is not a history book. Antonio Cederna, the author, apologizes profusely to the memory of the Vandals for using their name with all the traditional connotations of destructiveness which history has attributed to them. The "vandals" he has in mind

are much more dangerous and furthermore they are indigenous. They are those Italians who, especially since the end of the last war, spurred by the desire for easy profit, by ignorance, or by lack of taste, are conducting an unrelenting campaign for the destruction of Italy's artistic monuments. From the controversial developments around the Via Appia and the Colosseum, to the imminent changes near Piazza di Spagna, to the threatened destruction of Venice, of old Milan, of sections of Lucca etc., author Cederna presents a most comprehensive panorama of past, present and future destruction of Italy's monuments. The subject is a touchy one in Italy nowadays and one on which Italians are even more divided than they are in politics. Published by Laterza, the book is certain to add fuel to a smoldering fire, and may perhaps prove instrumental in the solution of a problem which is becoming more and more acute.

●

THE REASON OF STATE, the treatise written by Giovanni Botero a few decades after Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, has appeared in English translation by P. J. and D. P. Waley (Yale University Press). As against the basic ideas of Machiavelli, Botero insists that the foundations of politics are grounded on principle, not expediency.

LA VITA NUOVA of Dante will soon appear in another English translation (Rutgers University Press). The translator, Mark Musa, is a recent graduate of Rutgers, and his work on *La vita nuova* was done while he was an undergraduate. A 1956 Henry Rutgers Fellow, he is now the holder of a Fulbright scholarship and is studying at the University of Florence. Among the other English translations of *La vita nuova* is the one by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1861.

●

A HISTORY OF ITALIAN LITERATURE extracted from the critical works of Benedetto Croce has been compiled and selected by Mario Sansone. It is published by Laterza and it consists of three volumes. Croce always firmly believed that the history of literature in a chronological order is an impossibility. His literary critical writings always took the form of monographs as separate and distinct units. Throughout his life Croce adhered rigidly to this principle but death forced his surrender. With thoughtful kindness the book has been titled *La letteratura italiana, per saggi storicamente disposti* (Italian Literature, by Essays Arranged in Historical Order).

●

PEDAGOGICAL STUDIES have reached a high peak in Italy in the last few years. One of the most interesting work which has appeared lately is *I classici della pedagogia ital-*

iana ("Classics of Italian Pedagogy") published by Sansoni and directed by Ernesto Lama and Luigi Volpicelli. The series is in seven volumes of which the first deals with the Middle Ages and the last with the positivistic period. Notable, even if disappointing, is the fact that the contemporary period has been omitted. Educational concepts and theories are undergoing a severe crisis in Italy at present, and we suppose that a volume dealing with modern times, by necessity militant and controversial, could not have been part of a series called "classics."

THE HISTORY OF FASCISM in Italy has filled many a page in many a tome. The very abundance of material makes difficult the choice of a truly objective and reliable source. This difficult choice has been greatly facilitated by the appearance of *Storia d'Italia nel periodo fascista* ("History of Italy during the Fascist Period"). Written by Luigi Salvatorelli and Giovanni Mira, and published by Einaudi, it is perhaps the most penetrating and serious study of a most controversial period of Italian history.

VASCO PRATOLINI has completed the last draft of the second volume of *Una storia italiana* ("An Italian Story") which Vallecchi will publish. The title of the volume will be

I Maestri, i Malesci e i Corsini ("The Maestris, The Malescis and the Corsinis"), after the names of the families whose history the book relates.

CARLO LEVI is at work on a book which may be called a treatise on love. It will be titled *Gli amanti* ("The Lovers") and it will be published by Garzanti.

ALBERTO MORAVIA'S latest book, which is about to be published, will be called *La ciociara*. (The title derives from the name given to the peasants of the countryside around Rome).

THE 1956 SALENTO PRIZE, for a narrative work dealing with the South of Italy, has been assigned to Elio Vittorini for his book *Erica e i suoi fratelli—La Garibaldina* ("Erica and Her Brothers—The Garibaldina;" Milan: Bompiani, 1956). The book consists of two novelettes which had been written and published, but not in book form, many years ago. *Erica*, written in 1936, had been published in part in the reviews *Campo di Marte* in 1938 and *Il Tesoretto* in 1939, and then in its entirety in *Nuovi Argomenti* in 1954. *La Garibaldina*, written in 1949, was published in *Il Ponte* from December 1949 to May 1950.

It is important to establish accurately the chronology of these two works because they must be considered as filling certain gaps in the development of Vittorini as a writer rather than furnishing an indication of new trends in his present activity. *Erica* was written before *Conversazione in Sicilia* (translated into English as *In Sicily*), the crucial book in Vittorini's evolution. *Erica* is the story of a young girl who prostitutes herself to care for her brothers after their parents have abandoned them. But she is still a child and her emotional immaturity does not permit any moral questions to enter into a consideration of her behavior. Prostitution is just another way, and apparently the only one, to provide for the younger brothers, and Erica's mind and soul are not soiled by the experiences of her body. It is in this tragic, dual aspect of her life that Erica acquires a touching and moving reality which finds a fitting counter-

part in the delicate manner in which Vittorini presents her to the reader and leads him into the naïve workings of her mind.

La Garibaldina which follows the writing of *Conversazione in Sicilia* shows surprisingly little of those innovations of style and technique so much in evidence in the other writings of Vittorini in this period. The book is basically a character analysis unfolded before a backdrop of historical events. Unfortunately this analysis is often carried too far and the reader becomes lost in the overabundance of details and in the overstressing of certain facets of the protagonist's personality which at times verge on caricature. Certain sections, such as the one dealing with the townspeople of *La Garibaldina*, are much more successful artistically, and the same can be said for those situations where surrealist elements creep in, giving a different tone to the narrative.

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